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HISTORY OF WITNEY



BY W. J. MONK.

Author of the "History of Burford," etc.

WITNEY:

PRINTED AND PUBLISHED BY J. KNIGHT, "GAZETTE" OFFICE.

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1894.

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P R E F A C E.

N writing this History, much information has been obtained from material collected by the late Mr. William Langford.

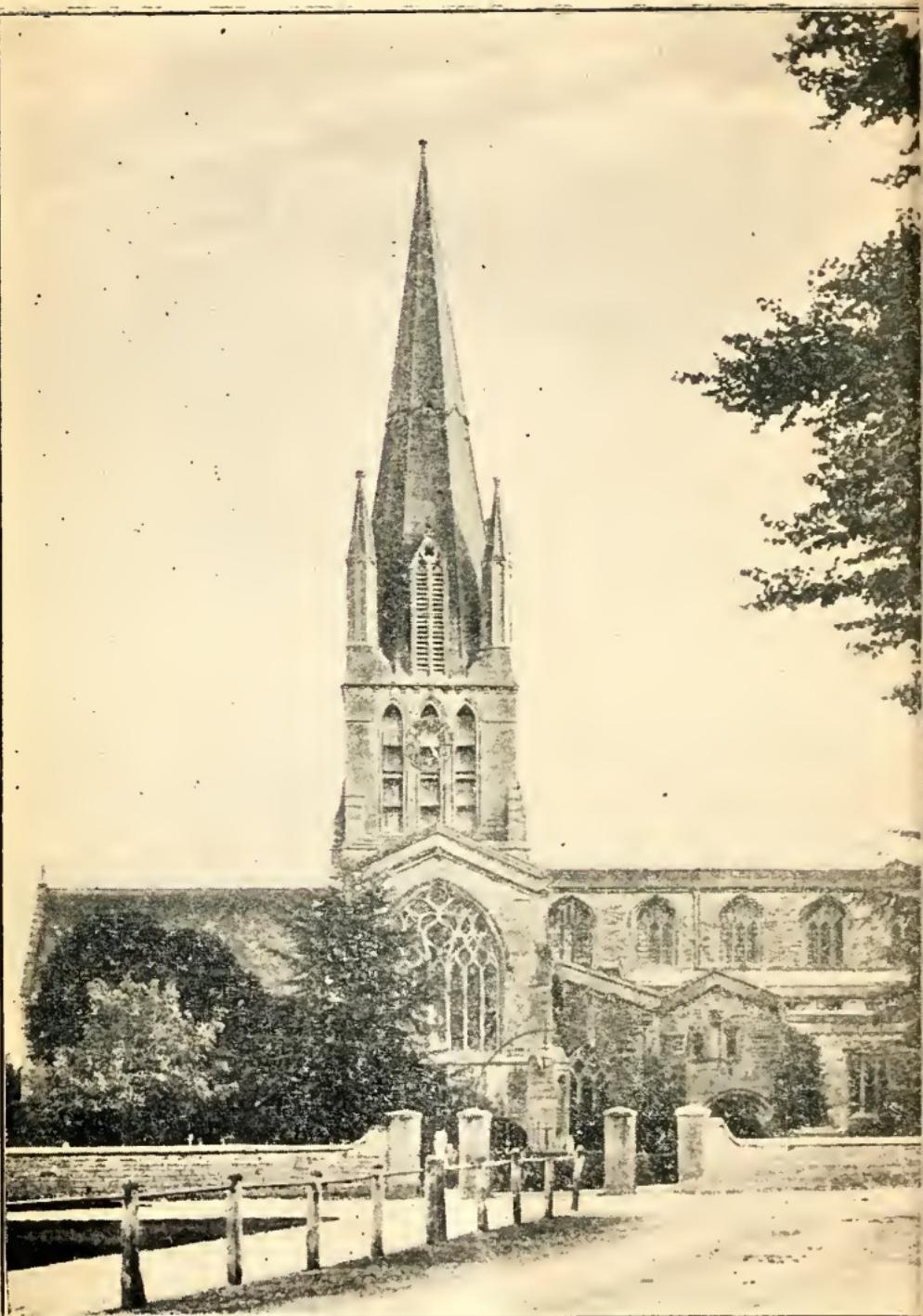
The Rev. W. H. Hutton, M.A., Fellow of S. John's College, Oxford, has, with much kindness, looked over the proof-sheets, and to him the Author tenders his best thanks.

Thanks are also due to Canon Norris, the Rector of Witney, for his valuable help, more especially with regard to the Ecclesiastical History of the town.

There are many others who have contributed, in various ways, to the production of this volume. The Symond's M.S.S., in the possession of T. M. Davenport, Esq., of Oxford, have been of great service; the Rev. W. D. Macray, of Ducklington, has rendered valuable aid; the Rev. C. J. Verschoyle has also assisted in no slight degree; while Messrs. C. Gillett, and Leigh have helped much in matters relating to Nonconformity in Witney.

Lastly, thanks are due to Miss Emmeline Monteith, of Ipswich, for aid given with respect to the illustrations.

August 30th, 1894.



ST. MARY'S CHURCH, WITNEY.



History of Witney.

INTRODUCTION.

THE town of Witney stands in a valley, through which the river Windrush flows. It is bounded on the West by long low hills, from Burford; and on the East by uplands, somewhat higher, which separate it from the University and city of Oxford. The town consists, mainly, of a street a mile in length, which, at the South, is called the High Street; at its other extremity this appellation is dropped, and Bridge Street and West End take its place. At the Southern extremity, as you approach from the G.W.R. station, Witney has a most picturesque appearance. A fine avenue of limes (planted some twenty-five years ago, mainly through the exertions of the late Dr. Augustine Batt), leads up to a singularly beautiful Church and Churchyard, through which the pedestrian passes on to a spacious green, which has, somehow or other, escaped spoliation during the many devastating ages

through which the country has passed ; this presents a verdant carpet, and serves, in some measure, to remind us of the time such a place was a necessary adjunct to town and village, when most people were required to possess some knowledge of archery. The houses on either side, although many of them modern, are in harmony, and are built generally in such a style as to render the scene somewhat picturesque. The Church stands directly facing the town, its grand old Norman doorway appearing to invite parishioners and others to escape sometimes from a world of trouble and care outside into its sweet quiet, where thoughts of higher and nobler purpose than those connected with this world may arise. Such was one design of those glorious old builders, doubtless, who in an age which we now see but dimly, raised this noble edifice, worked rough stones into beautiful images, set up finely proportioned edifice and tapering symmetrical spire ; in this, not only erecting a building which should remain for ages sanctified to the worship of the Most High, but which should also be for all time a monument of their love and reverence.

The reader will find in Witney very little of that interesting domestic architecture which adorned the fourteenth and fifteenth centuries, and which may yet be seen in many of the neighbouring towns and villages. It has nearly all disappeared long ago, the necessities of a busy manufacturing town compelling the destruction of lovely, though narrow and inconvenient, erections, which were most unsuited to a place where life was, even in the last century, beginning to partake of something of

the nature of the fast “go-a-head” existence, which most people lead now. And yet, there can be no doubt, that Witney, in common with other places in a more artistic age than the present, had houses with lovely overhanging gables and barge boards, decorated with all the carver’s skill, and, inside, splendidly worked beams and grand fireplaces—for stone and wood were plentiful enough ; the former existing in great quantities a few miles away at the great quarries at Taynton, from which place, tradition says, the stone came of which Old St. Paul’s and many of the Colleges at Oxford were built, and, probably, all the local Churches, including Witney ; the latter existing in great quantities in the neighbouring forest of Wychwood. So, perhaps, we shall not be far wrong if we picture the Witney of centuries ago, presenting a more picturesque appearance than it does now, though the Church was then very much as it is to-day. The noise of the loom towards the latter end of the fifteenth century was even at that time heard in the streets ; the place was occupied by workmen who were engaged in weaving, but life then went on at a much slower pace. There was time then, in the midst of the struggle for existence, to turn round leisurely to contemplate the beautiful creations of the architect and builder, more time for week-day acts of worship and festivals. Have we improved on the habits of that far-off age ? We have, indeed, to-day wealth which in quantity is immeasurably superior to that possessed by our forefathers five centuries ago ; our looms are turning out, year by year, more and more blankets ; the commerce of the country becomes so great that ships can

scarcely be built to carry it on. These things are true, but ought Life to be made up of nothing but spinning uncountable yards of webbing? Is there no nobler purpose than the collection of wealth? No doubt in very many matters, we have made great strides since the days of which we have written. It may be doubted, however, if a love for art and beauty has risen in equal proportion.





CHAPTER I.

Witney in Early Times.

EVERY little is known of Witney at the time when the country was subject to the Roman invader, and as the latter was never fond of low-lying situations, favouring rather those from which he could see what was going on around him, it is more than probable, that, although Britons lived here, and with blue-stained skin paraded the Windrush in their frail coracles, yet the lordly Roman gave the swampy hollow, for such it was then, a wide berth. The great Roman Road, *Akeman Street*, passed a few miles to the west of the town, and this would hardly have been the case if a colony of any size had existed at Witney. Bye-roads, both British and Roman, no doubt existed, and remained even after the time, when the invaders came in their thousands from across the North Sea, bent on conquering a country more to their mind than their own sterile tracts, but none of them appear to have entered the town,

because it was fortified and surrounded by a huge earthern rampart and dyke. This refers, of course, to the part of the town which lies South of the Windrush, for it may well be doubted if there were not two separate towns here in Saxon times, and certainly in a map centuries later, two distinct towns are indicated. That the Windrush or Wemris, as it was then called, formed the boundary line of the two powerful kingdoms of Mercia and Wessex admits of no doubt, and it is even probable that the Up-town and Down-town fights, which existed not long ago on the 5th of November, were degenerate relics of the old feuds, which at one time prevailed between the two rival nations, who at this place faced each other.

ORIGIN OF NAME.

England was divided in Saxon times into *Counties*, *Hundreds*, and *Tithings*, the latter consisting of ten families, sometimes more, who dwelt together, and were responsible for each other's behaviour. Each tithing is said to have had a Church, though if this were so, the buildings must have been of an unpretentious nature. Perhaps there is some truth in the statement, however, for there is a tradition that Dorchester had at one time 40 Churches, and that Standlake and its vicinity possessed 17. The Tithing made the parish, and ten of these composed the Hundred ; but it is probable they were made at random, rather than on any definite numerical plan. In the Hundred the men of wisdom assembled to settle all disputes, and to discuss local matters, and the expressions *the Hundred affirms*, or

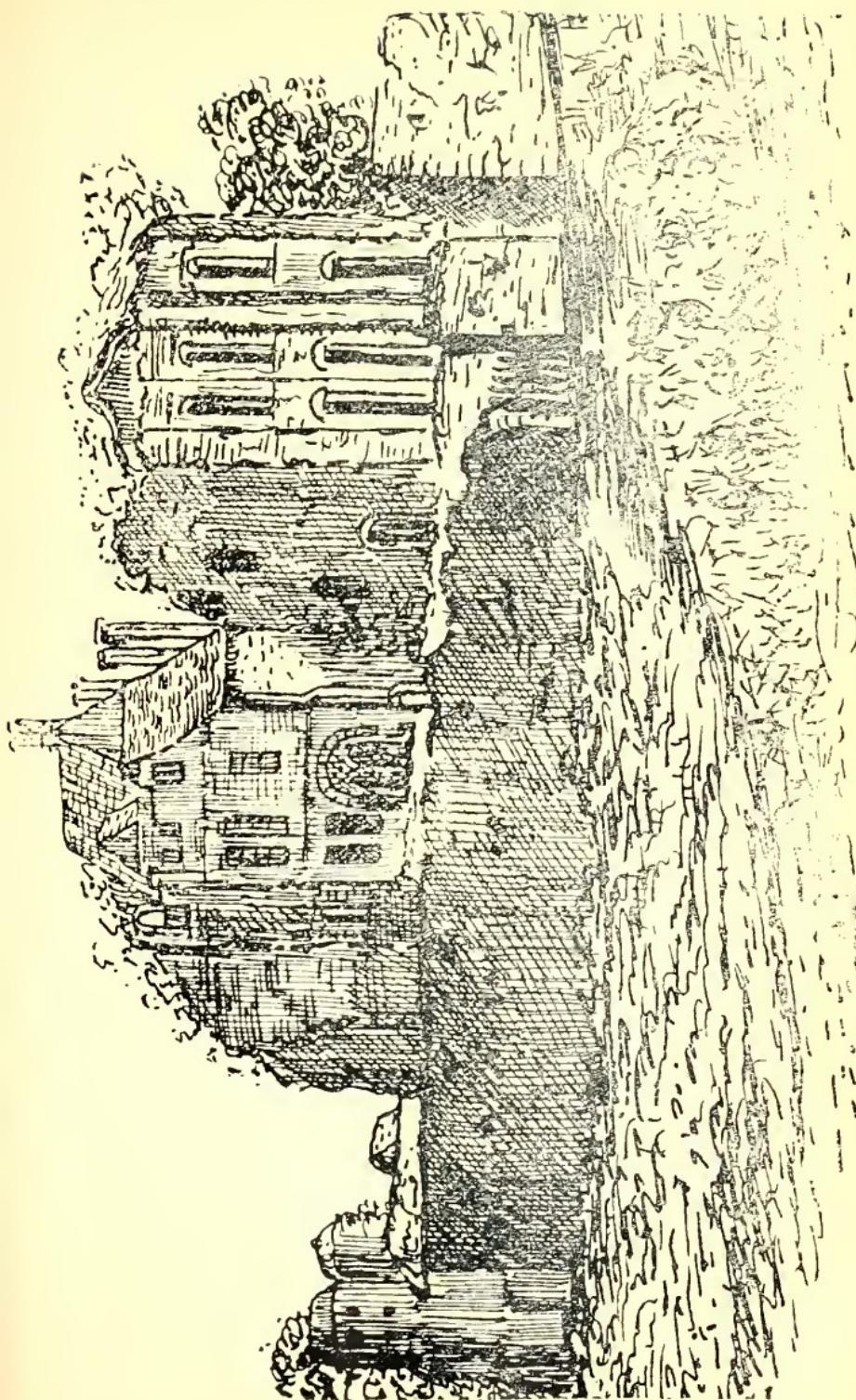
the Hundred denies have come down almost to our own times. The Saxon Witan was an assembly of the chief men convened from contending parties, or by usage, called together to consult on measures of defence or government. The Saxons had the most beautiful system of self-government the world has ever seen, and which they brought from Germany. Each village had its Folk Moot, which assembled in the Moot Hall, to order the social life of the Settlement. Over these presided Eldermen—Aldermen we call them now—and stripes and imprisonments on delinquents were settled at these Meetings. Each principality had its Witan, and a larger gathering of Saxon chiefs took place sometimes to discuss great political and religious topics. The ordinary gemot or meeting of the Witan, was held at some well-known place, often in an island, or the marshes of a river, the place being further strengthened by a wall of earth thrown all round. Witney was doubtless one of the favoured spots, and perhaps our forefathers, endued with more respect than we are towards those who have the control of government, called this the *Isle of Witan*, or *in Saxon Witan-ige*. The names of many other towns have been conferred for reasons more or less honourable; but if the above conjecture be the true derivative of the name, Witney people may rejoice in the fact that their town owes its name to those councils which first gained for England the reputation of being the Mother of Parliaments. There are other conjectures respecting the source from which the name sprang. Some have connected it with the name of an over-lord who resided in the swampy

hollow, and ruled over the Saxon serfs, many of whom were generally engaged in tending their vast herds of swine in the beechen glades of Wychwood Forest ; others have connected it with Wemris, the Saxon name for Windrush. The reader must select which of these theories best suits his fancy or his judgment.

In a Charter of Edgar, dated 963, a place called *Wentanige* is mentioned, and the same name occurs again in a Charter of Edward the Confessor. It is by no means certain that these names stand for the place which we now know as Witney, but it is likely enough for the town was, probably, in Saxon times, much better known than it is to-day. Again, the lands round *Witanige* are in yet another document said to have been given to the noble Oelfhelm ; but in 1044 this land was once more in the King's hand, and was granted to Alfwine, Bishop of the West Saxons.

WITNEY PALACE.

This Bishop of Winchester appears to have built a Palace at Witney, and there can be no doubt that *this Ecclesiastical residence stood on the site, which the house, now called the Mount, occupies.* Almost all the evidences of this have now disappeared, for the present house is modern, or nearly so, but foundations which tell a tale of sustaining a more pretentious building than the present, have been discovered. Fortunately some idea of the former beauty of this old house can be obtained from the annexed sketch. The original drawing is amongst the Gough prints, which are in the Bodleian Library. The doorway of this Palace appears to have been a magnificent semi-circular arch with massive mouldings



The remains of the Palace of the Bishops of Winchester at Witney, 1729-30, sketched by Canon Norris, from *Burch's drawing in the Bodleian Library*.

and pillars, and richly carved Capitals. That on the left or North, had a reticulated shaft, and the other a zigzag one. The house itself appears to have been erected at a much later date, judging from the chimneys and some of the windows. On each side of the house, which may have been occupied even when the sketch was taken in 1729, are ruins, all of which, judging from the remains of the windows, appear to belong to the very early Norman period ; and although at the time when Alfwine is conjectured to have built this house, the Norman had not obtained dominion over the English, yet the fashions of that nation had been introduced before 1066. As will be seen, the ruin presents a most picturesque appearance, being partly overgrown with brambles and other plants. Such was the Palace to which the Bishops of Winchester were in the habit of resorting when harassed, perhaps, with the cares of the large diocese over whose spiritual wants they presided. Often have their great retinues travelled through the streets of Witney in days which have departed long ago. Bishops in those distant times were different, very different, to the peaceful holy men, who, in the majority of instances now fill the seats of the prelates of the early days of the English Church. They were great barons, often engaged in angry controversy on political matters, sometimes even having recourse to the sword.

QUEEN EMMA,

The Mother of Edward the Confessor, seems to have been in some way connected with Witney, for her name appears on the Charter, granting the

lands to the Bishop, but what was the particular nature of the connection, we have been unable to determine. As this Queen's story is so closely connected with our subject, a short sketch of her life may not be considered here irrelevant.

Emma was the grand-daughter of that venturesome Northman, named Rollo, who had left Germany, and by dint of the force of arms, had settled himself in the fair province of France, which from this circumstance has ever since retained the name of Normandy. This "Flower of Normandy" as she was then called, came over to England to marry as unhappy and unheroic a king as history mentions. The Saxon Chronicle mentions the event as follows :—

"In the same year came the lady, Richard's daughter, Emma Elgive (her Saxon name) hither to land."

It was to a country torn with dissension from one end to the other to which this fair daughter of Normandy came. The King, whose bride she was to be was so feeble that men have called him ever since "The Unready." = (without rede, *i.e.* Counsel) Little did the young girl think, perhaps, as she sailed across the English Channel, that before many years had gone by, people of her blood and nationality, would sail over the same sea bent on conquering the land to which she was now bound, and having conquered it to grind it down with iron heel for centuries. It was at the time Emma became the bride of the "Unready," that the incursions of the Danes had become so threatening, and inspired so much dread, that money

was paid as a temporary expedient to get rid of them. The Queen appears to have taken some active part in endeavouring to drive the Northmen away, as the following extract from the Saxon Chronicle shows:—

“Anno 1003. This year was Exeter entered by storm through the French churl Hugh, whom the Lady (*i.e.* Queen Emma) had appointed her steward; and then the army (*i.e.* the Danish Army) entirely ruined the town, and there took much booty.”

Emma appears to have lived little enough with the king. No doubt she was as much convinced of his imbecility as were most people, and perhaps during the dark days when the foolish king conceived the awful thought of massacring the Danes on St. Brice's day, she was away at one or other of her numerous castles. Be this as it may, it is quite certain that at Islip, not far away, her son Edward, whom men afterwards called the Confessor, was born. And when her brave stepson, Edmund Ironside, had mysteriously met with his death, and cruel Canute had come and induced the Witan to make peace with him, she, with her two sons, Edward and Alfred, fled to her native land of Normandy. The new ruler of England, however, as well as being cruel, was, in many respects, an extremely sagacious man, and one of the very first things he did on getting possession of the throne of England was to link himself to the fallen dynasty by marriage with Queen Emma. It is said that Emma engaged herself in this marriage on the understanding that if they had a son, he should succeed Canute. If this arrangement was really made it was never followed, for Harold, the son of the king by a

former union, succeeded his father, though Hardicanute, Emma's son, reigned at his half-brother's death. What part the Queen took in the Christianizing of her kingly husband ; what share she may by her influence have had in the great changes which Canute made in English laws ; whether she saw that remarkable scene on the sea-beach when the wave rolled up to the royal knees and soaked the kingly robes—history does not say. When the great king died, and the son of her first husband was unexpectedly made sovereign, she appears to have resided at Islip, and even sometimes to have occupied Witney Palace. Then occurred the event which connects her specially with Witney. Robert, Archbishop of Canterbury, published a report concerning Emma, in which he asserted that she had been unduly intimate with the Bishop of Winchester. A Synod was at once called to investigate the truth of the story. Both parties are said to have denied the truth of the scandal, and Emma is understood to have volunteered to undergo the Ordeal of Fire. The story goes on to state that this took place in Winchester Cathedral, and that the Queen walked blind-fold, but unharmed, amongst nine red-hot plough-shares. That this ordeal took place rests on most uncertain evidence. The Saxon Chronicle speaks of the harsh conduct of the Confessor to his mother, but says not a word about the plough-shares, and the whole story seems to rest on the authority of Ralph Higden, who mentions it in his *Polychronicon* (fourteenth century).

Wharton, in his History of English Poetry, speaks of the minstrel who sang the tale of *Queen Emma*

delivered from the *Plough-Shares*, but the whole evidence in support of the story is quite unreliable. Most probably even the scandal is a concoction. If there be any truth in the statement the affair must have taken place between 1043 and 1047, as Edward ascended the throne in the first named year, and Alfwine died in the latter. Supposing Emma to have been twenty years of age when she married the Unready, she would have been at the time the scandal arose over sixty years of age. The story goes on to state that in commemoration of her happy escape she gave nine manors to the Church of Winchester, one for each of the *Plough-shares*. Alfwine also gave nine manors of his own property, and King Edward gave three. Those the Queen gave are in the Latin record named as follows :—

Brandesbury, Beyefield, Fyffhide, Hoghtone, Wychelneryshe, Ivyngelio, Wycombe, Weregrays, Halylyne. The Bishop gave Stoneham, East and West Meone, Hentone, Wytneye, Yelynge, Mylbroke, Polhamptone, Hodyngstone. The King gave Portland, Wykhelewelle and Waymuthe.

So it would appear that the patronage of Witney has belonged to the Church for nearly 900 Years.

EM'S DYKE.

A small stream, which flows through the meadows round Witney, is called to this day *Em's Ditch*, or Dyke. And, of course, diligent antiquarians have not been wanting who have connected this stream with the name of the Flower of Normandy. In the charter of Edward the Confessor granting the lands to Bishop Alfwine, a

place is mentioned called the *New Ditch*, and it is possible that this notice may refer to the stream under discussion. There appears to be no real reason, however, for connecting the Queen's name with this ditch, except the supposition that Em is a contraction of Emma. A far less fanciful, and probably more correct etymology is *Ham's Ditch*, or drain of the hams, *i.e.* water meadows.

MINT TOWN.

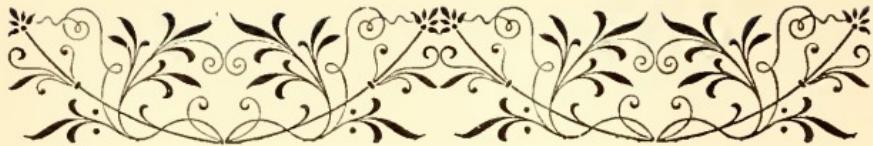
Witney seems to have been a mint town even in Saxon times, its name appearing first upon a penny of Harold II. It is again discovered upon a coin of William I, (or II) but no money has been found of a later date. It is said by those who have made ancient coinage a study, that it is impossible to distinguish the coins of the time of the Conqueror from those of the reign of his "red son," but it is quite possible that both may have coined money at Witney. We know that the Conqueror often visited Langley in Wychwood Forest, not far away, for the purpose of indulging in hunting, and he doubtless on these occasions, visited the town, and conferred certain privileges on it., or it is easy to suppose that the long continued residence of the Bishops of Winchester would be sufficient to account for the conferring of such an honour on this place.

The foregoing is all that is certainly known of Witney in what we have called *Early or Saxon Times* but there will be doubtless those, who with picturesque imagination will fill in the ellipses, which must necessarily occur in a History, where the materials are none too plentiful. Well served, we like to think, was

the Saxon Church, which probably stood on the site of the present one. Ploughmen were busy in the field around, dressed in the smock frock, which is just beginning to die out of memory ; shepherds were tending their herds on the rich grass land of the Windrush Valley ; Queen Emma and her Ladies clad in graceful mantles, ornamented with trinkets of various kinds, as was the custom, culled the roses and lilies in the Palace Garden ; no doubt, the streets of the town were made lively with the merry laughter of those who were setting out for a day's hawking in the Forest and its neighbourhood ; without question that drinking of methelin, or mead went on, which gained for our Saxon forefathers an unenviable reputation ; doubtless, too, the Saxon Ladies plied their needles busily enough in working that tapestry, which was known and prized all over Europe.

Witney was not in those days an unhappy place. It is true, there were many things which existed, such as slavery of some kind or other, on which we have made great improvement, but on the whole, so far as government is concerned, it may be doubted, whether with all our boasted civilization, we stand in a better position than did our Saxon forefathers at Witney in *Early Times*.





CHAPTER II.

Witney in Mediaeval Times.

THE conquest of England by the Normans, made, in all probability, very little difference to Witney. There was here no powerful Saxon Noble to be deposed, for the manor belonged then to the Bishop of Winchester, and although the victorious Frenchmen did not allow anything connected with a prior possession of the land to trouble them very much, if at all, yet in matters ecclesiastical none can be found throughout the annals of History more scrupulous than they. Naturally religious, and not a little superstitious, all the possessions of the Church were left absolutely untouched by the new powers, and, when to this is added the fact that many of the Bishops of Winchester in those times were themselves Normans, and more than one intimately connected with the reigning family, it will be seen that Witney was in a peculiar fortunate position.

Of the town in these times we know nothing, but one or two things it is safe to conjecture. There can

be no doubt from the fact of the Bishops of Winchester possessing a Palace here, that Witney people had more opportunities of observing the ways of the Court than had most of the neighbouring places. The various sovereigns and notabilities of all kinds, who came as visitors, brought with them, we may be sure, followers full of news of what was going on in the great world outside, and it is only natural to suppose that from contact with them the Witney people possessed many advantages over their neighbours.

A new town, doubtless, arose in early Norman times on the North side of the river, and it is more than likely that people of a different tribe to those in the up-town occupied it. They were, in all probability, men of the wood—Hwiccæs—the Saxon tribe which first inhabited and gave a name to Wychwood Forest, which then extended to the banks of the river Windrush. No doubt in early Norman times these suffered from the odious Forest Laws, which was one of the most disagreeable effects, so far as the Saxons were concerned, of the Norman Conquest. Henry II had afforested most of the manors on the South side of the river, and though the people who lived there were under the jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester, it is easy to see that sometimes the officers of the King, and those of the Bishop would come into collision. So, we find, there was an attachment recorded against the Bishop of Winchester for taking venison and grubbing in the King's woods and chases. This was in the reign of Edward I. The Bishop, however, pleaded that the King had granted a charter, and his Majesty remembering

this exonerated him from the charge—(Closed Rolls). The right of chase, which seems so ancient as to date back even to British times, was also kept up whether the Bishop was present or not. It is probable, however, that in Plantagenet times the existence of two powers, one ecclesiastical and the other secular, led to more than one feud in Witney, or in the neighbourhood.

KING JOHN AT WITNEY.

As was stated in the previous chapter, it is more than likely that most of the Norman Kings stayed at Witney, though of this there is no certain record ; but there can be no possible doubt that the town was visited more than once by King John. In the Itinerary of that King, prefixed to the printed volume from which our extracts are taken, it appears he was at Witney at the following ascertained dates :—

June 12th and 13th	...	...	1207
Jany. 18th and March 13th	...	...	1209
Nov. 7th and 8th ...	...	...	1213
Nov. 27th	...	...	1214

As may be seen on reference to the chapter dealing with the Lords of the Manor, the Bishop of Winchester, Peter des Roches, occupied a position of some importance at this time in the land, and it was probably on a visit to the Bishop here that the man, who has the unenviable reputation of being the worst King that ever sat on the throne of England, came. What plottings took place here antagonistic to the liberties of the people of England we do not know ; the

visits of John were, however, made just at the time when the conflict between liberty and tyranny was at its very height ; at a period, too, when the King was fearful and suspicious of everyone, and remained rarely more than a night or two in any one house. The old record states that the King had “x palfreys and iii garcones” at Witney for his use ; and there is also mention of a discharged account for wine, which it is satisfactory to learn was actually discharged—contrary to the Monarch’s usual custom. But while the old chronicler is most minute in describing much that is interesting to him and his contemporaries with respect to such matters as “palfreys and garcones,” he is entirely dumb as to what would be of supreme interest to us. Was the Sovereign when he resided at Witney such a one as he has been conjectured ?—“A blustering, dissipated, human figure, with a kind of blackguard quality air, in cramoisy velvet, or other uncertain texture, uncertain cut, with much plumage and fringing ; amid numerous other human figures of the like ; riding abroad with hawks ; talking noisy nonsense ?”—We cannot say. What we do know is that he was engaged in a quarrel with the Pope at the period of his first visit, with respect to the appointment of an Archbishop of Canterbury, and that for a time the tyrant King held out, and made the unhappy English drink the cup of sorrow to its bitterest dregs, on account of the Interdict which the Pope hurled against England. Witney Church, as all other Churches in the land, was closed ; the effigy of Saint and Martyr, viewed at that time with so much awe and reverence, was draped in black, and the Holy Eucharist could be

administered only to the dying. It was unquestionably the greatest punishment which, in that age, could be inflicted. Many were the evils from which people suffered in those days, which could not be prevented ; but Famine might come, War and Pestilence might ravage the land ; these, to a superstitious people, were almost tolerable compared with an Interdict which seemed to shut them off from all possible chance and hope of Heaven. So the dreadful trial to the whole nation went on for years. The doors of Witney Church, and all other Churches, were closed when John visited the place again in 1209, and the English peasantry were in the lowest depths of misery. The King was hated by all, and he was conscious of this hatred. Vainly did he try to ingratiate himself with his subjects ; he remitted the taxes which had, till this time, been enacted on account of the Forests, hoping to win their favour. But he was, at this time, rightly connected with the taking away of privileges which were then, and should be now, the most precious of the inheritance of man. He trusted no man, and no man trusted him. In the four years, however, which intervened between his first and fourth visit to Witney, great changes had taken place ; for the Pope had, in the meantime, sent the most deadly shaft from his spiritual quiver ; he declared the throne of England vacant, and called upon Philip of France to expel John from his kingdom. This brought the coward to his knees, and just before he visited Witney in 1213, he had, in Dover Cathedral, laid his crown in the dust, and, with grovelling tears, promised faithful obedience to the Pope, together with a yearly sum of money.

WITNEY AND MAGNA CHARTA.

Then came an event which may be faithfully described as the most important which has ever taken place at Witney. The English people were filled, as time went on, with a stronger and fiercer discontent. Distinctions of race were beginning to die out, too, and Norman and Saxon united themselves in a common cause. Moreover, a new class was then beginning to spring up ; for many of the oldest Norman families had ruined themselves in the Crusades, and their estates were acquired by those, who at Witney and other places, had made themselves rich, either as manufacturers, or as agriculturists. They had seen how easy it was to subdue the King ; they had witnessed his cowardly submission to the Pope, and they were prepared to make an attempt to secure more freedom than they had hitherto enjoyed. So, headed by Stephen Langton, an Englishman, but Archbishop of Canterbury, (an event unusual enough in those days) ; the barons, and those associated with him, swore not to rest till they had secured the object in view. As will be imagined, many were the times, and dishonest were the means, which the King took to evade them ; sometimes pretending he was ready and willing to execute their wishes, at other times laughing at their demands as being ridiculous. He was at Witney in the dark and gloomy days of November, in 1213, and from his Palace at Witney, he summoned a *quasi* Parliament at Oxford, apparently to discuss the *Articles*, which afterwards expanded into *Magna Charta*. No records remain of what took place at Oxford, and it is doubtful if that assembly ever met to any purpose, as it is more

than likely the King changed his mind directly the writs were issued ; but what took place at Witney is worthy of remembrance.

It was the first writ in which four discreet men (commoners) of the county were summoned to consult in the National Assembly. In the Shire Moot four men and the Reeve (Shire-reeve=Sheriff) had represented the township from time immemorial ; now four men and the Sheriff represent the Shire in the National Council. The following is a copy of the Writ :—

“ Rex, vicecomiti Oxon., Salutem. Præcipimus tibi quod omnes milites Baillivæ tuæ qui summoniti fuerant esse apud Oxon ad Nos a die omnium sanctorum in xii dies venire facias cum armis suis ; corpora vero Baronum sine armis similiter ; et quartuor discretos homines de comitatu, tuo illuc venire facias ad nos ad eundem terminem ad loquendum nobis cum de negotiis regni nostri. Teste meipso apud Wytten (eyam) vii die Novembbris.

(Dorso) Eodem Modo Scribitas omnibus viceomitibus.”

So, by chance, Witney has played a not unimportant part with regard to the foundation of our liberties in *Magna Charta*. The Meeting at Oxford which this writ summoned may, or may not, have been held, but the issuing of such a document at all was a sure indication that freedom was slowly, but surely, making its way, and that the power of a dissolute and ill-conditioned, bloodthirsty tyrant was beginning to fall.

HENRY III.

To Witney, too, came Henry III, when a boy of fourteen years. Peter des Roches, the Bishop of

Winchester, to whom reference has before been made, had the care of the King's person during a considerable period of his boyhood, but of this, and of other matters connected with England at this time, fuller particulars may be gleaned, as has been before stated, in the chapter on the Manor. At the time the young King came to Witney, the strife between Peter des Roches and those who were averse to foreign influence was at its very height ; but of course the King, though he appears to have been very much under the Bishop's influence, was too young to play any important part. The details connected with this visit are very meagre, though they throw a side light, as it were, on the relations which existed between the Bishop and his pupil. The old Chronicler states that the King expended "xx pounds upon his wardrobe during his visit to Peter des Roches at Wittenage in 1221," and he further states that the Bishop granted the King a loan of "L Marks, to be repaid out of the Exchequer." This we may regard as a little pocket money, which was allowed the Royal youth at this time, who appears to have been kept, as all boys, Royal or otherwise, should be, with a limited supply of cash.

But the habit of *asking* for money seems to have clung to the King, for not many years after we find the same sovereign *asking* his Parliament for money to carry on the war with France. His ancestors had been used to *take* it, without going through the modern performance of *asking* the owners' leave ; which fact was an important and portentous one in the History of England. Again, why should Henry, or the Bishop who

acted for him, spend such a sum—equal, at least, to £240 of our money—on his wardrobe at Witney? Is this an indication that the Valley of the Windrush was, even then, celebrated for the making of woollen cloths? It may be so; certainly the manufacture carried on may not have been large, but the making of some cloth or other must have been necessarily going on in England somewhere or other at this time, and there appears no reason against supposing that it was on account of the opportunities which presented themselves that Henry III replenished his wardrobe here.

PARLIAMENTARY REPRESENTATIVES.

Events in England shortly after this—thanks to the good offices of Sir Simon the Righteous—proceeded rapidly in the direction of progress, and it was not many years after the tyrannical and crafty Bishop of Winchester disappeared from the scene that the Sheriff of Berks and Oxford received a writ directing him to send two burgesses from each city and borough to meet the Lords in Parliament at Westminster, “to deliberate concerning diverse matters touching our Kingdom of England, and also the establishment of our land of Scotia.” A writ was sent to “Witteneye,” (as the name was then spelt), as well as to other places; and for some years, and in several Parliaments the town was represented. The following appear to have been the names of the members :—

EDWARD I.

33. Parliament at Westminster.—John le Haston.
Will Rawlyn.

34. Parliament at Westminster.—Walter Rawlin,
(returned only)

EDWARD II.

34. Parliament at Northampton.—Adam de Pyry.
Will Daveneyes.

4.

5. Parliament.—*Ballivi nullum responsum.*

8. Parliament at Westminster.—John de Standlake.
John Savage.

9. Parliament at Westminster.—Will Forest.
Henry Plummer.

EDWARD III.

4. Parliament at Westminster.—Thos. de Miniside.
John Wellow.

Some surprise may be expressed at the fact that only one burgess was sent to the second Parliament, to which the Witney people had the opportunity of sending two members. It may be doubted, however whether the sending of a representative to the National Council really was looked upon as a privilege then. Very different was the part, which was taken by the representatives of the people in those days, to the honourable office which our modern Members of Parliament fill. They were admitted, at first, on sufferance, and were called together only for the purpose of voting sums of money. This, they were expected to do in a very humble and perfectly dumb manner ; moreover, these members had to be paid, and since there was, as Parliament was then constituted, no means of obtaining redress for any grievance, and indeed no compensating advantage whatever, it is easy to understand that the good people of the town, if the

opportunity presented itself, allowed what was then a doubtful privilege to pass by altogether.

We know nothing whatever of the men who represented Witney in Parliament. They may have been, in the first instance, those who resided in the town, and perhaps have become wealthy in the woollen manufacture. Walter Rawlyn, seems to have been a man of some degree of importance, for when in the next year after the sending of the burgesses, knights were summoned from the County, he was one of those selected. John de Standlake may have been a person of consideration, at the little village, whose name he bore. If so, it would appear to imply that the men selected by the town, were not in all cases *bona fida* burgesses ; indeed it is reasonable to conjecture that the townsmen, as a body, took very little interest in the matter at all,—members had to be sent willy-nilly, but as these members could avowedly do them no good, what did it matter who went to Westminster ?

ROTULI HUNDREDORUM.

Edward I caused a survey to be made of all the Counties, and Hundreds, and the several rolls which contained the Report of this survey, are called *Rotuli Hundredorum*. The original document of this inquisition, so far as it relates to Witney, may be found in the Record Chest of the Town, of which the following is a Copy :—

“ The jurors find that the Bishop (Nicholas Ely) holds the Manor and the Fishery of the River. There is a wealthy market on Thursdays, and two Fairs,—on the day of the Ascension, and on St. Leonard’s day.”

TOURNAMENT.

Few and scanty are the details which the jurors give by which we can judge anything whatever, regarding the Witney of the early Plantagenet times, but there can be little doubt they were palmy ones ; the Bishop must have brought many and noble visitors to his Court, and though of this, there is no direct evidence, the woollen trade flourished for a reason, which will be given in Chapter 4.

Games, from the Courtly Tournament to the humble Morris dance, took place, we may be sure, and once Witney was the scene of what was, doubtless, a very imposing ceremonial. Here an old Chronicler tells us, "did Aylmar, Earl of Pembroke, from his castle, at Bampton, near by, meet Humphrey de Bohum, Earl of Hereford, in "solemn jousts."

Both of the above noblemen played no unimportant part in the unhappy times, through which the country was then passing. "Joseph the Jew," was the nickname which that overbearing Gascon youth,—Piers Gaveston,—saw fit to bestow on the former, on account of his long pale visage, and as the Jews were at that time regarded with much disgust, it is easy to understand how such disrespectful conduct roused the spirits of men in time, and eventually caused them to strike off the vicious foreigner's head at Blacklow Hill.

What has been called "Solemn jousts," might perhaps be more correctly termed "simple jousts." This was merely the shock of two knights, who, galloping towards one another with levelled spears, sought either to unseat his antagonist, or to splinter his

lance on shield, or helmet. The scene of this pageant may have been the grounds, which then surrounded the Bishop's Palace, and very likely indeed, what we now call "Church Leys," would be the spot. If this be so, we must leave the scene to the reader's fancy. The knights in full armour, holding spear and lance with different colours attached to them ; the tents and scaffolding, where were seated the most powerful, and the most beautiful in the neighbourhood ; the grand old Church, in the back ground, with the stately Palace of the Bishop ; the solemn silence as the victor approaches the Queen of the Feast, while she decorates him with the meed of his achievements,—these scenes will doubtless occur to the picturesque reader, and he must clothe some such a scene as his fancy directs. There is no reason, however, why this pageant may not have taken place at Witney Park, which was on the High road, leading to Burford. Here the Wenmans resided. The present house, which stands on the site of a much larger, and more pretentious edifice, has few evidences of its associations with a more important part, but the uneven nature of the ground and other relics, serve to show that long ago a moat ran round it.

RELIGIOUS CEREMONIALS,

We are sure, took place at Witney, and often has the grand old Church looked down on many a fair and gay procession, as it passed in and out of its Norman gateway. This is not a conjecture at all, for we get a curious insight into a certain ceremonial, from the pen of that curious old writer, Lambarde. He says :—

"WYTNEY. A large parish, part of Wichewod Forest, in Oxfordshire, as by the Perambulation, shal hereafter (God willinge) appeare. In the days of ceremonial religion, they used in Wytney, to set forth yearly, in manner of a Shew or Enterlude, the resurrection of our Lord and Saviour Chryste, partly of purpose, to draw together some concourse of people that might spend their money in the towne, but chieflie to allure by pleasant spectacle, the comon sort, to a likinge of Popish Mammetrie; for the which purpose, and the more largely, thereby to exhibite to the eye, the hole action of the resurrection, the priests garnished out certain small puppets, representinge the persons of Christe, the Watchman, Marie, and others, amongst which, one bare the part of a waking watchman, who (espyinge Christe to arise) made a continual noyce, like the sound that is caused by the meetinge of two styckes, and was thereof commonly called Jack Snacker, of Wytney."

Lambarde then proceeds to state that he had seen a representation of the coming of the Holy Ghost in "Poules Church," which is now commonly called St. Paul's Cathedral, and which representation was in some respects similar to the one at Witney. But Lambarde wrote in 1601, nearly 50 years after the time when such ceremonials were common enough, and the nation during this time had in some matters, gone from one extreme to another. It was not half a century before this, that to utter such words as old Lambarde used, would have meant, in all probability, something exceedingly unpleasant for the author. Had not

another book besides Lambarde's been written within the time mentioned, by the sovereign of the land too, in which he had assailed with ingenuity, and some amount of success, a German theologian who had ventured to express opinions, which were destined to turn religious matters topsy-turvy.? What the royal author would have thought of such an expression as "Popish Mammetrie" in these days, is a question. But the mention of such a subject at all, by Lambarde, is a distinct proof of the importance of the ceremonial which took place at Witney. This is all we know respecting it. Whether it was held on the Green, in front of the Church, or in the spacious meadows at the back of it ; whether this ceremonial owed its origin to the action of one of the Bishops of Winchester, when residing here, are questions which will naturally arise, but which the reader must decide, as he may prefer.

It is more than likely that Witney Palace ceased to be an ecclesiastical residence after the 14th century. The times were stormy, and for many years men knew not where to dwell for safety. The Palace here, though in some measure, no doubt, protected, was yet most unsuitable for withstanding a siege of any severity, and it is more than probable that from the commencement of the Wars of the Roses, Witney Palace ceased to be a residence of the prelates of Winchester.

They discovered doubtless, the superior advantages such a well fortified stronghold as Farnham Castle possessed over the Palace of Witney, which was not built for strength and security in turbulent days. We have no knowledge with regard to those who may have

lived here during the centuries which elapsed, till the Palace was destroyed. No doubt, however, there were many of the wealthy traders of the town, who were only too pleased to inhabit a place with some historical associations, and which was at the same time fairly commodious. When the Palace finally disappeared, is also a matter of doubt. The sketch of it, a reduced copy of which appears in this book, was taken in 1729-30. It was then in ruins, but the story of so important a relic, and many particulars respecting it, would not have to pass through many hands in order to come down to a period of 50 years ago, and yet all notion of it appears to have been almost completely lost !

Another writer, by name LELAND, gives us a singularly meagre account of Witney, as it was in 1550. He says :—

“ There is in those quarters (the wolds of Gloucestershire) a village called Wynderush, and so is the river of Whitney commonly called,” and in another part, “ Thens (from Newbridge) 4 myles or more to Whiteney, where is a market, and a fayre Church with a goodly pyramid of stone.”

Yes, Leland ! this we know, we can see it now in all its beautiful symmetry, which puzzles our modern architects, no little, but why not tell us of things which we are so anxious to know ? In what state was the woollen manufacture ? In what condition was the Palace, and who lived there ? What was the population when you were here, three centuries ago ? But Leland is silent ; even as those who live in time as distant as we are from those of Leland will deem us.

OXFORD UNIVERSITY AND WITNEY.

But there is another matter not without interest to Witney people, and which Lambarde mentions in another part of his book in writing on the University of Oxford. After mentioning several Colleges and Halls which had no endowment, he says :—

“ There was sometyme a House of Learninge, called Staple Hall, but wheare it stooode I have not by hereto learned.”

Walter Stapledon Bishop Exon, in the time of Edward III, founded Stapledon Hall in 1316 ; this was afterwards called Exeter College. May not this have been, by corruption, the origin of the Staple Hall of which Lambarde mentions the traditional existence ? And is it not possible that the Staple Hall at Witney derives its name from some connection with this old foundation ? whether this be so or no, it is quite certain that in the Middle Ages, Witney was closely allied to the University. There was no greater anxiety to the Authorities at Oxford in those days, than that which was associated with that terribly ravenous destroyer of the fifteenth and sixteenth centuries—the Plague. Frequently the Pestilence had dispersed the students to their several homes, an event which, in our days, would be no extraordinary matter, and one perhaps not attended with much inconvenience, but which, in times when locomotion was difficult, and many students were in the habit of not leaving the University from one year’s end to another, could be regarded as nothing less than a dire calamity. With the Plague continually visiting Oxford, means were taken to prevent its advent from becoming more

harmful than was necessary, and to this end sanitoriums were provided in many of the adjoining towns. Witney had certainly one, and when we consider its close proximity to the University, we may feel warranted in hazarding the conjecture that there were more. The house, which was certainly a Sanitorium, is situated on Church Green, and although it has been, in some measure, modernised, and consequently spoilt, it is easy to trace on its doorway and in its great beams the work of the 16th century. It is said that a Chapel existed in some part till a few years ago ; if this were so, it has completely disappeared. That a house of this nature existed at Witney is conclusively proved by the following extract from a M.S. in the Bodleian Library, dated 1718 :— “Here, at Witney, is an old house, formerly a college, designed as a retreat for the fellows at Merton College in case of a plague.”

Here, then, in the Middle Ages, did the students and others of the University of Oxford assemble when they were in dread of the Plague ; and Witney was rendered more picturesque still by the sight of the members parading the streets in cap and gown. What other events took place here in connection with the students, history says nothing, though it is not at all unlikely that an imaginative mind will be able to fancy several matters taking place which are now the exclusive privilege of Universities. The building at Witney was generally spoken of, till within the last fifty years, as “The College.”

An event of some importance took place here, which, although it does not belong to the Middle Ages,

shall yet find a place in this chapter, because it appears to partake more of the ignorance of those times than of a later era.

A REMARKABLE ACCIDENT.

It was in the 17th century that an accident occurred at Witney, which was, in itself, remarkable, and which was rendered still more remarkable through the Puritanical misrepresentations, which were principally set forth by John Rowe, of the University of Oxford, "lecturer" in the town of Witney. He published an account of the occurrence and called it "Tragi-comædia," being "a brief relation of the strange and wonderful hand of God, discovered at Witney in the comedy acted there February 3rd, where there were some slaine, many hurt, with severale other remarkable passages, together with what was preached in three sermons on that occasion from Rom. i. 18, which may serve as some check to the growing Atheisme of the present age, 1652."

We have progressed, and rightly too, since the days when Mr. Rowe thought it his duty to publish his incoherent ravings ; but at the time they were written, it is said they had much influence, and were actually successful in causing the suppression of many plays of the period. The play presented on this occasion was entitled "Mucedoris, the King's sonne of Valentia and Amandie, the King's daughter of Arragon ; with the merry conceits of Mouse, &c." All the actors were countrymen, and came from Stanton Harcourt, not far away. Their acting, and the whole affair, was probably of the rudest description. Poor ploughmen, who had in the

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seclusion of their own village earned a reputation amongst their fellows, and who hoped by performing before a larger audience at Witney to increase their fame, and, at the same time to gain a pecuniary reward. They were denied the use of the Town Hall, but this, in the time of the Commonwealth, when men were expected to look sour and vinegary was no remarkable matter, indeed, the performing of the play at all at this period is astounding in the highest degree. The actors then secured the "White Hart," an Inn which stood at that time in the Market Place, and which has been rendered more interesting from the statement having been made that it contained a tapestried room, once occupied by Queen Elizabeth. There is no authentic record of the visit of this Queen to Witney, though it is more than likely that she came to the town. She was frequently at her hunting lodge at Langley, not far away in Wychwood Forest, and it is perfectly certain that she visited the town of Burford. What more likely than that the good Queen honoured Witney in a similar manner? Here, at the ancient hostelry already mentioned, in a large apartment which was ordinarily used for drying malt, did the clowns propose to give their entertainment and at 7 o'clock at night the drum beat, and the trumpet sounded to tell the good people of Witney that all was ready. The play had proceeded for an hour and a half, when one of the huge beams, which supported the room unaccustomed to the unusual weight, gave way; the flooring gradually sunk, and many of the audience were precipitated into a lower room. Then for a short time an awful silence ensued, which was soon broken by the

groans of those who had received contusions. Five people were killed and a large number injured. This accident, as may be supposed, created much excitement for miles around. We may certainly take no notice of Mr. Rowe, and his foolish and bigoted ravings, for the only lesson, such an occurrence teaches, is, that care should be taken in selecting rooms where large audiences are likely to assemble.

This is all that can be gleaned after a diligent search, of Witney, in Mediæval Times. It was probably, though, a very prosperous place. It suffered in no respect from the Wars of the Roses, or any other of the calamities which came upon the nation in those times. There were troubles and anxieties then, as now, matters which were well-known to demand care and thought ; others unknown, but which if known, would have occasioned deep anxiety, such for instance as that connected with the Armada, for Philip of Spain is said to have given orders to his officers, that when they had conquered England, special attention should be bestowed on Wychwood Forest, on account of the magnificent oak which was in a great measure obtained from there, for building purposes in the Naval dockyards. Poor King ! His is not the only example which History affords "of striking the metal too soon," but it was a fortunate matter for the peace of mind of the people of Witney, that they were unaware of the special attention which, Philip proposed to give the country around them, still more fortunate that "God blew with his wind," and scattered the Spaniard's Fleet.



CHAPTER III.

Witney in Later Times.

THE number of Tradesmen's Tokens which were issued at Witney, and which were so general throughout the country in the 17th century, is so unusually large—having regard to the population—that there need be no hesitation in assuming that the trade of the town was, at this period, in a wonderfully prosperous condition. Nor is this surprising, for although Witney did not absolutely escape the Civil War and some minor disturbances, yet the town, so far as can be ascertained, suffered less, owing to a combination of fortuitous circumstances, than did most other places which were situated near Oxford, which city was the centre of operations, in a great measure, when Charles I began to pull one way, and the English people, by the eternal law of freedom, began to pull in an opposite direction.

It has been ascertained that the following were issued from Witney :—

O.=Obverse. R.=Reverse. The mark—signifies that what follows is in the field, or central part, of the token.

- O. Richard Ashfield.
- R. of Witney.—a Fleece. R. A. M. $\frac{1}{4}$.
- O. Thomas Brice of—a shuttle.
- R. Wittney, his halfpenny—T.J.B. $\frac{1}{2}$.
- O. William Chamberlain—His halfpenny.
- R. in Witney, 1666—W.J.C. $\frac{1}{2}$.
- O. Thomas Collier in—a fleece.
- R. Wittney. Clothier.—T.C. $\frac{1}{4}$.
- O. Richard Dutton of—His Halfpenny R.D.
- R. Witney Clothier.—Clothmaker's Arms $\frac{1}{4}$.
- O. Thomas Dutton—a merchant's mark.
- R. In Witney—a woolpack $\frac{1}{4}$.
- O. William Titchett—His Halfpenny.
- R. of Witney $\frac{1}{2}$ 1671—W.E.F.
- O. John Gardner in Witney—Two Shuttles.
- R. His Halfe-peny 1669. J.E.G. $\frac{1}{2}$
- O. Thomas Gregory Chandler—the Tallow Chandler's arms.
- R. In Witney 1664. T.J.G. $\frac{1}{4}$
- O. Leonard Goode.—L.J.G.
- R. of Witney 1657—The Baker's Arms. $\frac{1}{4}$
- O. William Hearn at the—A Swan.
- R. White Swan in Witney—W.J.H. $\frac{1}{4}$
- O. William Hearne at ye—a Swan.
- R. Swan in Witney—W.J.H. 1668. }
- O. Andrew Holloway—a hand holding a glove.
- R. Of Witney, Clothyer—A.H. 1659.
- O. Jo. Jordan, of Witney—a merchant's mark. $\frac{1}{4}$.
- R. In the County Oxon.—J.G.I.

- O. Peter Katte at the 3—three leopard's faces.
 R. Libbets Heads in Witney—his halfpenny, 1670. $\frac{1}{2}$.
 O. Johne Palmer—a woolpack.
 R. In Witney, 1656—J.A.P. $\frac{1}{4}$
 O. William and Mary—W.N.S.
 R. Sanders, in Witney—Their halfpenny. $\frac{1}{2}$.
 O. Thomas Ward at ye—the Tallowchandler's arms.
 R. In Witney, 1668—his halfpenny. $\frac{1}{2}$.
 O. Ralph Werge—The Mercer's Arms.
 R. of Witney, 1653—R.M.W. $\frac{1}{4}$.
 O. Andrew White of—A.M.W.
 R. of Witney, Senior, 1667—his halfpenny. $\frac{1}{2}$.
 Robert Willy, Senior—his halfpenny. $\frac{1}{2}$.
 O. John Young—a man making candles.
 R. of Witney, 1655—J.A.Y. $\frac{1}{4}$.

Witney looked at this period, no doubt, much as other places,—gay and resplendent, with innumerable painted signs, which hung from well-nigh every tradesman's house. An examination of the list of tokens given above, will show the reader the many signs which were customarily used, and when to these are added those which are not given, but which, in all probability existed, such as the Blue Boar, Golden Key, Saracen's Head, &c ; it will be allowed that the scene which Witney in common with other places, afforded, although picturesque in some respects, must have been in a measure, bewildering enough. In those days, an unsavoury kennel ran down on each side of the road in Witney High Street, from the foot of the Hill to as far as where the Wesleyan Chapel now is ; this still existed in 1821, but at this period the kerb was laid down, and footpaths were formed. Witney people at this time behind their counters, and in other places of business,

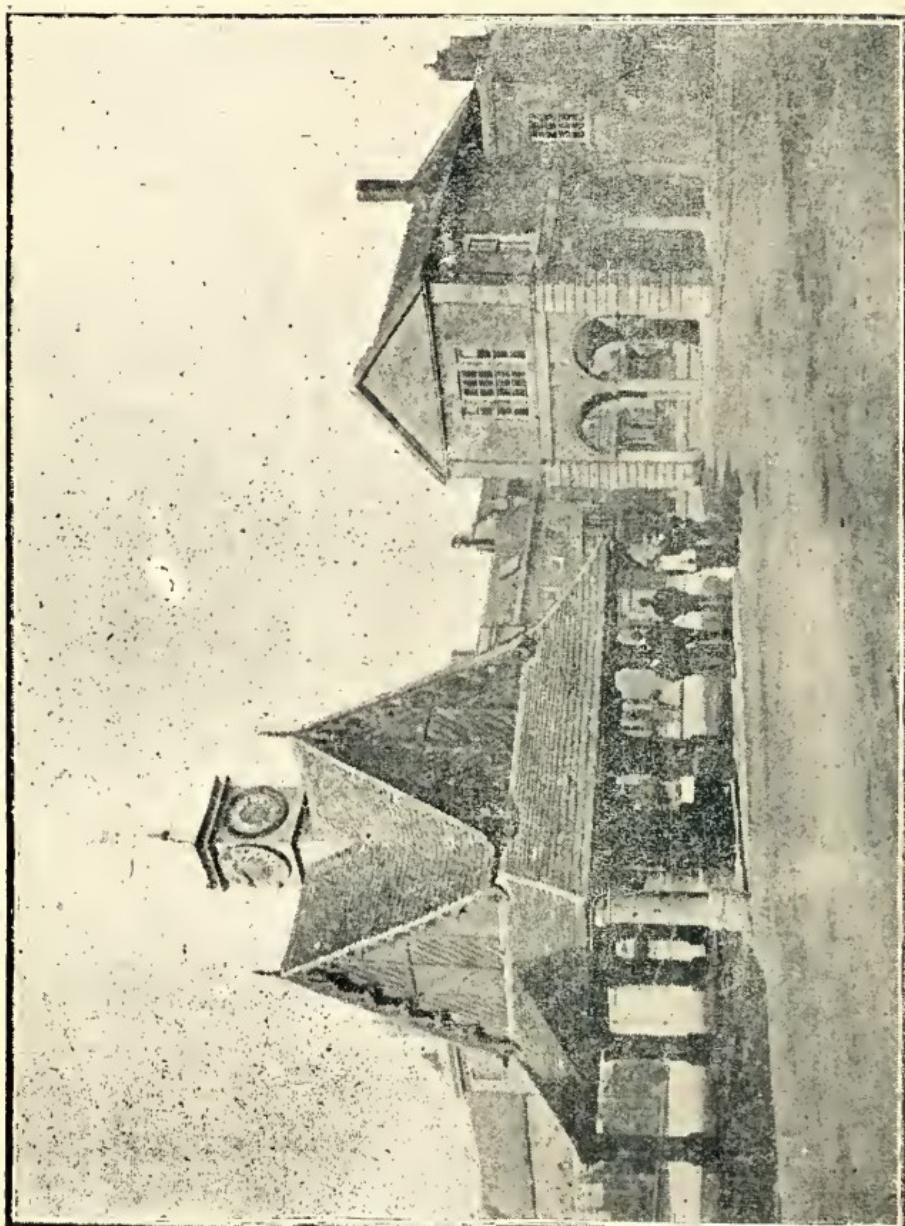
pursued the even tenor of their way, no doubt, leading an essentially busy and sober life, troubling little, perhaps, about the mighty changes which were going on outside, and unconsciously but surely, laying the foundations of that commerce, which is now the envy of all other nations.

The History of Witney for a period of 100 years, dating from the close of the Civil War is, however, singularly meagre, and there is very little indeed, except the tokens before given, to help us to form much idea of the place in those days. There was the usual excitement at Election Times, as now, only it was probably of a rougher, and it may be of a more immoral character, than what we experience in later times.

THE WENMANS,

Who lived at Caswell House, near Witney, and who were closely connected with the woollen manufacture (as may be seen by referring to Chapter 4) appear to have acted as representatives for the County, through many generations, as the following extracts will show :—

- 1555. Sir Thomas Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.
- 1597. Sir William Wenman, Knight M.P., for County.
- 1620. Sir Richard Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.
- 1626. Sir Thomas Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.
- 1628-40, Sir Francis Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.
- 1640-53, (Long Parl) Thos. Visct. Wenman, M.P., for County.
- 1660 Visct. Wenman, Sir Thos. Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.
- 1671. Sir Francis Wenman, Knight, M.P., for County.



1754. Visct. Parker,—Sir Edward Turner, M.P., for County.

The last mentioned were Whigs, called the Yellows or the New Interest ; they were supported by the Duke of Marlborough, Earl Harcourt, Earl Macclesfield, and other local magnates. The opposing parties were Viscount Wenman, and Sir James Dashwood, called the Blue or the Old Interest. It is said that owing to some dispute, all four were returned in 1754, but that the House of Commons declared the Whigs elected. After this period Viscount Wenman appears to have represented the County in 1768, '74, '79, '80, '82, '84. As the Wenmans were so closely connected with Witney the various scenes which took place on the occasion of the several elections at this town, where they would have many partisans, must be left to the imagination.

In 1734 a calamity of a rather serious nature occurred at Witney. A fire broke out in a tallow chandler's shop, and before it could be subdued, 30 houses were completely destroyed.

MARKET CROSS.

The Market Cross, or as it is sometimes called, the Butter Cross, which is a low building standing on round pillars, supposed by some to be of great antiquity, is really a somewhat modern structure, for it was erected by Mr. William Blake of Coggs, in 1683. It is probable however, that a statue of some kind—Tradition says one of the Virgin—had stood here for centuries. It is possible that the base of the pedestal, which the present building covers, was in some way connected with this. No doubt, Witney in common with other towns, had its

Market Cross ; these structures, however, excited the wrath of the Puritans, and many of them disappeared in the time of the Commonwealth. All knowledge with respect to the structure, which we cannot doubt, existed at Witney, has been lost, but it is possible that the Butter Cross stands on the site which it occupied, and the tradition with regard to a Statue of the Virgin, may be explained by supposing that the original Market Cross,—as was the case in some other places,—consisted of a representation of the Mother of Christ with her Divine Child in Her arms.

Witney, too, like many other places, appears to have gone mad with joy on the outbreak of that great European Conflict, which has always been known as the

SEVEN YEARS WAR.

Tidings of the wonderful conquests which Britons had made in India, and all over the world, no doubt, reached Witney more rapidly than some other places, on account of the frequency with which its traders visited the Metropolis, and other places of light and leading. The wonderful tales of the wealth which had been acquired together with innumerable stories of heroic courage which Britons exhibited, had stirred the national spirit in no slight degree, and every true born Englishman looked upon a Frenchman as his natural enemy. For the French, too, were endeavouring to found colonies as well as the English, and with equal right, though course the latter did not think so. For years a kind smouldering warfare had been kept up between the two nations, and when in 1755, war was actually declared

the delight of English people knew no bounds. What Witney thought of the matter is sufficiently indicated by the following notice, which appears in an old newspaper :

" 1755. War was declared against France, at Oxford Witney and other places, and on the like occasion, there never appeared a more general joy on the face of every true Briton in hopes of once more humbling a perfidious enemy."

Then eight years of the deepest consequence to Witney and other places in the land, go by, and during that time people here and elsewhere had learned much. Gallant General Wolfe, like his great opponent Montcalm, had perished on the heights of Abraham, and Canada, one of the finest possessions of the Crown, had been added to the Empire ; Admiral Byng had been shot for not fighting ; the great Commoner had been hurled from power ; Plassey had been fought and won, and what was of very much more importance to the people at home, the Bridgewater Canal had been begun and was promising well for completion. Poor George II had died in dearly beloved Hanover, and his grandson, George III had taken his place on the throne of England. And all this time the ghastly warfare had proceeded, bringing with it grim ruin and black death. Taxes too, had become enormous, scarcely a household was there, either in Witney or elsewhere, that had not suffered in some way from the frightful scourge. The country, it was true, was becoming the most glorious the world had ever seen, but at what a cost ! People at Witney, we may be sure, were heartily tired of the fray, for this was before our colonial commerce had

commenced, in any measure, and although there may have been those here, who with some prescience, were able to conjecture, that splendid fields were being opened for the sale of blankets, yet to the poor, who always suffer most on such occasions, it brought nothing, but loss of work with the starvation which invariably accompanies it. What the Witney people thought of the Declaration of Peace, which followed the Treaty of Fontainebleau, against which Pitt spoke for three hours, becoming at the end of that time so exhausted, that he was unable to record his vote, is indicated in the following letter, written from Witney by a correspondent whose identity has not been discovered.

"1763. April 9th. This day peace was proclaimed here with the greatest Formality. A numerous band of music collected from the town and neighbourhood, all mounted; together with drums of all sizes, some on horseback, others on foot, attended the ceremony, and besides the Peace offering, the cavalcade was headed by two furious old warriors armed with hand grenades, as also a Marshal to preserve order. Our Bailiffs wore their white bands, the Master and the Blanketer's Company appeared on horseback, who were preceded by the Tuckers on foot, in which order a procession was made for about two hours, and the Proclamation read by the Parish Clerk at the usual places, and for the last time against the Market Cross, about 11 o'clock. The Cavalcade was very numerous, and consisted of people of all ages, decorated with cockades. The concourse of spectators was very much greater by being both Market and Fair Day. After the ceremony, money and bread

were thrown to the populace from the market house, and the whole was so admirably conducted that the utmost applause is due, on this occasion, to the performers. Their dress, though not costly, was splendid, and the whole Farce conducted in the most burlesque taste imaginable."

It is said to be a wise order of Providence which prevents us from seeing the future, for what the people who were cheering for the Peace would have thought if they had been able to foresee that the Country was to remain for another 50 years, constantly embroiled in one war or another, we cannot think. Certain it is that we are now reaping the reward of the courage and patriotism of the Englishmen of those days, and perhaps it may be said truthfully that few places have benefitted more by the foreign acquisitions then made, than Witney.

So with Wars, and rumours of Wars, life jogged along on the banks of the Windrush, at the time when John Gilpin acquired fame by making his remarkable gallop. Roused it was sometimes, we can imagine, with such prospects as the following extract from an old newspaper shows. It was just at this very date that the towns of the North were beginning, on account of the coal-fields near them, to expand into the mammoth places which we now behold. Did Mr. Lacey, we wonder, think he might be able to turn the pleasant countryside round Witney into a black dirty place, remarkable for wealth, indeed—but remarkable for dirt too? He may have done. There may have been, too, those manufacturers in Witney whose hearts fluttered,

not a little, at the prospect of being able to take advantage of steam power, which even then, was beginning to be used, and, of course, to excite attention. As is well known, the project came to nothing, and on the whole, Witney and its neighbourhood may be congratulated on the fact.

“ 1764. July 21st. James Lacey, Esq., Lord of Eynsham Manor, one of the Patentees of Drury Lane Playhouse, opening a pit a little on the South side of the Turnpike Road, over Northleigh Heath, where a bed of coals is said to have been discovered long since—when they dug many years ago, some say seventy—other hundred yards deep, when, having no engine, water rushed in, and at length obliged him to desist, after spending the chief of his fortune, and when within a few yards of the mine, the old pit now re-opened, and is already 100 feet deep—the old framing not the least impaired.”

Nor were natural phenomena wanting to supply food for thought and reflection at this time, as the following letter shows :—

“ 1766. From Witney, in Oxon. Being on the borders of Whichwood Forest last week, we were greatly alarmed in the night, which was very tempestuous, with a most extraordinary noise, that somewhat resembled the distant explosion of guns, or thunder. But the next morning, on taking a ride through the glades, we discovered it to be occasioned by the rending and fall of vast branches or arms from all sorts of trees, which were scattered so thick upon the ground as to render the roads almost impassable. This appeared to be owing to

he immediate and immense congelation of a vast quantity of rain that fell on the branches, which incrusted them to an incredible thickness, and by its weight rendered them unable to resist the violence of the North-East wind that blew at the same time. Such phenomenon is not remembered by the oldest man living. The country people are now employed in vast numbers to collect the wood, which amounts to many hundred loads, and look on it as an interposition of Heaven at this severe and calamitous season."

This was, doubtless, a very unusual phenomenon, and though the matter may have been exaggerated in some degree by the writer—especially with regard to the distant thunder—yet it affords conclusive evidence that even at so late a time as 1766 the Forest of Vychwood reached very nearly indeed to the town.

We are able to gather, too, what the amusements of the people of Witney were at the end of the last century. The three principal times for recreation seem to have been

THE WHIT HUNT, FOREST FAIR, AND THE BATTLES OF THE FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

Of these, Whitsuntide seems to have been considered the most important. Its advent was announced some weeks previously by the blowing of horns, made in a manner peculiar to the town and neighbourhood. A stony pole was barked, and the skin twisted into a horn of primeval shape, into this a bassoon reed was inserted, and the reader will probably think that the sound of this horn must have been as unusual as its shape was primeval.

Witney people are now mercifully saved from the excruciating noise, made by a band of fifty performers, provided with horns of all sizes, tones, and notes, forming itself into a motley procession, which was accustomed in those days to parade the town several weeks before the Hunt actually took place. The origin of this Hunt has been referred to in a previous chapter, and it was most certainly an amusement in which Witney people had indulged for centuries ; the very use of the horns marks a very primitive state of society, when men were obliged to apply their ingenuity in the making of the implements of the chase. No doubt there was a time when such a horn was the only means which the sportsman possessed of showing those acting with him in what direction he was proceeding. But this was a long time ago, when nearly the whole country was forest. It may be however, that from the circumstance of these horn having been used in the first instance for sport, the Witney hunters still clung to them in an age which was more civilized and more luxurious.

On Whit-Monday morning, these horns were used for the last time that season, for on that day the band going in front of a rough pack of harriers, and followed by almost everyone in the town, (those having horses, or donkeys, mounted) marched as far as the Chase Green where they solemnly broke their horns on the stile leading to Hailey, called "Codling Corner." So they proceeded to claim their ancient custom of hunting in Wychwood Forest. By a curious custom, the origin of which it is impossible to discover, the first deer killed was taken to Hailey, the second to Crawley, and the

third was carried to Witney, where it was cooked in an informal kind of manner, in a huge frying pan kept, no doubt, for the purpose, and which knew little rest for a few days following Whit-Monday. But what appears to have been regarded as a much more important matter than eating any of the venison, was the possession of a piece of the slain deer's skin ; this was generally stuck in front of the hat. So much importance was then attached to the possession of this trophy, that it is recorded more than one fair damsel has decided which of the candidates for her hand should be the fortunate one, from the manner in which they conducted themselves in the Hunt, consideration being, of course, given to the amount of deer's skin in their possession. At this Hunt, too, most of the pugilistic quarrels, which had been smouldering during the year, were settled. Champions from various parishes, such as Finstock, Hailey, Witney, and, above all, the "Field Towners" announced weeks beforehand, that they would be ready after the Hunt to maintain not only their own prestige, but the honour of the particular parish to which they belonged. And as some quiet glade in the Forest was chosen for these "solemn jousts," probably very little harm resulted from the affair, except it may be a few broken heads, which were soon mended. In those times,

WITNEY FEAST SUNDAY

was indeed a great day. The Band, (for Witney, even then was noted for its music) met at the Staple Hall, and played the children up to the Church, preceded by the Clergy, and the principal inhabitants. The best

singers and organists from Oxford, generally volunteered their services for the day, and collections of a truly liberal character followed, it being no uncommon thing to hear of a collection of £70 at the Church doors. Many of the neighbouring gentry were in the habit of attending the Church on this day, the Lord and Lady Churchill of that time constantly did so, and even held the plates for collection at the Church doors.

Then for three days more, Witney people annually went mad with revelry. Races were held on Curbridge Downs, (situated on the left hand side of the Burford road) on Monday and Tuesday following, and Witney must on these occasions, with its people away from the town, have presented a great contrast to the crowded Green, such as may be seen on those days now. These races generally ended in a donkey race, from the Church door to Staple Hall and back, and in this competition every rider was placed on his opponent's donkey, and the last in was declared the winner.

But the greatest treat of all, the Wednesday, was yet to come, for on that day the renowned Forest Fair was held. This Fair differed in its origin from most others of its kind. Usually the existence of a Fair is traceable to a distant time, when locomotion was extremely difficult, and when the establishment of a Fair was an absolute necessity of the age. But it is manifest that Forest Fair could have owed its origin to no such circumstance. There is no trace of it earlier than 1790, and if a Fair had been established here in the Middle Ages, or after, the circumstance would have been noted in the documents of the time.

FOREST FAIR

appears to have originated towards the end of the 18th century, from the perfectly natural desire of the people of Witney and of the neighbourhood, to spend a day at this most beautiful period of the year, in the Forest, under the shade of the magnificent oak trees, before the Summer was yet over, and chill Winter had taken its place. Who the particular person was that founded this important institution is not known, but the idea is said to have originated in Witney. The Fair grew rapidly, and from the circumstance of a few families meeting together for a quiet picnic, a crowd in a few years, which is said to have numbered 30,000, congregated in the glades of Wychwood. This Fair has now been abolished for several years.

FIFTH OF NOVEMBER.

The so called "Battle" of the 5th of November, though looked upon in Witney at that time as a holiday, seems to have been in many respects very different to our modern ideas of recreation. As was stated in a previous chapter, the "Battle" may have possibly been a lineal descendant of other and more important contests, which in a distant time had been fought between the two Saxon races, whose territory touched at Witney. This is, of course, only pure conjecture, and certainly so far as researches have proceeded in the various books connected with Witney, there is no mention of the contest on the 5th of November at all. The townsmen at their Court were particular about many things; indeed there is nothing more remarkable in the various entries

which they made in their books, than the rigour with which they appear to have administered local self-government. It may have been that the ancient character of these feuds restrained the various officers from interference, otherwise it is almost impossible to believe that such disturbances would have been allowed. Certain it is that the Fights of November the 5th, were in full swing at the commencement of the present century, and although fair play seems to have been observed generally, there can be no doubt that many seized the occasion for paying off old scores. Such riotings have died out many years ago, as it was only proper, and in accordance with our modern ideas of civilization that they should do, and Witney people in these times happily, not even for one day in the year make the least difference between those who may dwell in the South of the river, the Up-town, and those who live North of the bridge, or the Down-town.

HARD TIMES.

And the times were full of anxiety then, as now. The Quartern Loaf is now selling at 4d., but at the beginning of the present century it was sold at 21d., and as may be imagined, with work scarce, owing to the wars which were ceaselessly taking place, few, very few, in Witney, were able to purchase the "Staff of Life" at all, and the poor people lived on barley bread, called "Clangers." Who can wonder that in various parts of the kingdom, men so far lost their patience and their prudence, that they broke out into something like open rebellion. Here at Witney, a swarm of men and women assuming a name which had proved disastrous enough at

the commencement of the establishment of the Commonwealth, went round the various villages and threatened to hang every farmer who would not sell his wheat at £20 per load. In this book mention has been made of several matters in which we have retrograded during the last three hundred years, but will any one be bold enough to assert that in such an economic matter as the one under notice we have not travelled forward and wisely? At any rate, there would be now no difficulty whatever in getting the descendants of the farmers, who lived when Napolean was keeping the energies of Englishmen employed, to sell their wheat at one third of the price the Witney Levellers insisted upon.

Witney was, too, at this time—if we may trust the written testimony of one who bore an honoured name—an extremely

SUPERSTITIOUS PLACE.

Whether it was more so than the neighbouring villages and towns is not recorded; but certainly if all he states be true, and there is no reason whatever for doubting it, the educating influence of the last few years has not been exactly thrown away. It would seem that there were, at least, two old women, so late as the beginning of the present century, who were generally supposed to have communications with the “Evil One,” and it was actually believed, by many people, that one of these had transformed herself, temporarily, into a hare on Curbridge Downs, had been shot at by a farmer, and wounded in the leg, and as a proof it was pointed out that the old woman was really lame.

Many residences were there in the town which had the reputation of being haunted, and in one of these, which enjoyed the greatest notoriety of all, the remains of six ghost nails, which a superstitious housekeeper put in between the courses of the stone, are to-day quite discernible. All this reads curiously enough to us who are accustomed to search for natural phenomena as explanations of what people in Witney regarded, a long time ago, as ghosts.

Then the Whipping Post and Stocks stood close to the Butter Cross, and many times in the year did the officers of the town exercise their muscles on the bodies of those who had outraged the laws. The last occasion on which this punishment, so out of touch with our modern ideas, is recorded to have taken place, was when a celebrated character, Billy Hack, was whipped by old Bellman William Harberd, for robbing the Rectory Garden.

The following extracts, taken likewise from the files of ancient newspapers, may not be without interest now :—

“ 1728. May 1st. We have the following remarkable account from Witney, in Oxon, *viz.*, that some days since, the child of one, John Marriott, being baptized, there were present no less than five grandmothers—the child’s father’s father was godfather, the father’s father’s mother was one godmother, and the mother’s mother’s mother was the other godmother, whose name is Ursula Townsend, of Staple Hall, in Witney. She is upwards of 100 years old, a hearty woman, has now above 150 children and grandchildren living.”

Both names mentioned above are well known and honoured in the town to this day.

THE TOWNSEND FAMILY

built Staple Hall in 1668, and lived there four generations, till 1780. Mr. W. Townsend, of this family, left Witney a poor young man, and went to seek his fortune in the great world. At Oxford he lived for some little time, but, like many others, he was drawn to the Metropolis, and at the age of 35 he was worth not one penny. Then he took a retail shop, about 1792, and rapidly acquired great wealth. Nor did this Witney worthy forget his native town in the days of his prosperity. The Independent Chapel was erected by his bounty, and the Almshouses, situated at Newland, were built and endowed by him, as an inscription on them states.

“1808. On Wednesday last, Mr. John Castell, of Witney, ascended to the top of Witney steeple, a perpendicular height, of 52 yards, by means of ladders. He took off the weather-cock and brought it down in the presence of a vast concourse of people. He was not more than eight hours fixing the ladder.”

JUBILEE OF GEORGE III.

“October 28th, Geo. Bartlett, one of the ringers, rang on this day in a peal at the Parish Church. He rang at the King’s Accession forty-nine years ago, and at every birthday since.”

Having regard to the dark and suffering period in which Mr. Bartlett lived, admiration for his extraordinary physique must not be withheld.

LOCAL MILITIA.

Nor was Witney, at this period, destitute of gallant men, who were ready when danger of no mean kind threatened the country, to lay down their lives for hearth and home, as the following extract shows :—

“ April 14th, 1810. Commission for Oxfordshire Local Militia, 1 or West Regiment.—Chas. Shard, Captain ; Dan Westell, Lieutenant ; John W. Clinch, Lieutenant ; Thomas Higgins, Ensign.”

“ May 5th. On Tuesday last, the 1st Royal Oxfordshire Local Militia met at Witney for twenty days.”

“ May 26th. On Monday last, the 1st Royal Oxfordshire Local Militia received a very elegant pair of colours from the hands of Her Grace the Duchess of Marlborough. They were presented in a meadow near the Church. Her Grace addressed Lord Spencer. He replied, and then the Duchess delivered the colours into the hands of the two senior ensigns.”

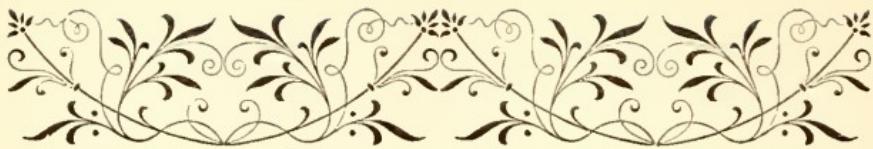
So whilst Wellington was engaged in anxious thought, safely entrenched within the lines of Torres Vedras, some of the Witney people, in their way—not less patriotic—were, by drilling themselves in the meadows near the town, becoming proficient in the use of arms, in order that, should necessity arise, they might help to save the country from invasion. At this very time the country was passing through a fearful crisis. Poor old George III, enshrouded in darkness, bodily and mental, was yet on the throne, but so incapable, that his son (not setting a very excellent example to the people,) was made Regent. The dreadful war still went on, blasting

the happiness of many a home ; draining the pockets of everyone in the land. But a time came before very long when the power of the despot was broken—thanks to the patriotism and the courage of Englishmen—and we have the following record :—

“July 2nd, 1814. On Tuesday last, a dinner was given at Witney in celebration of the Peace ; 1000 persons dined together on Church Green.”

Once again, within a year, was that Peace broken, and then Witney, in common with other places in the land, settled down to peace and security for half-a-century.

And what shall be said of Witney to-day ? Unlike so many places in the neighbourhood, it still retains the manufacture of woollens, which it has held for centuries. It stands out now, prominently, as having the best market of any town, with the exception of Oxford and Banbury, in the whole county ; and its people appear now to be gifted with that “go-a-head” spirit, which has throughout some centuries distinguished them. Agricultural depression, such as that through which we are passing, no doubt touches it severely ; but Witney may be said to be, in all truth, a pleasant place enough, a manufacturing town in the midst of a country, where for many miles on each side of it the people know no art save that of agriculture ; with enough history attached to it to render it a place of some interest to those who take a delight in the England of long ago.



CHAPTER IV.

The Woollen Manufacture.

WITNEY is not certainly known when Witney first became remarkable for the making of woollen cloth ; it is probable, though, that as early as Norman times the Valley of the Windrush was, in some measure, noted for this manufacture. Cloth, of some kind, must always have been made here, or elsewhere in England, though it was, most likely, till the 14th century, of a very primitive kind. The wools produced in the neighbourhood were, one cannot doubt, the chief of the causes which induced clothiers in old times to settle in Witney or the neighbourhood ; though it has been stated that the river Windrush, which flows through this town, possesses properties which occasioned the trade to be located here in the first instance. “Abstergive” is the name by which Dr. Plot, in the 17th century, describes the particular qualities of this river ; and though there may be those who will elect to believe that the Windrush

possesses no qualities but those which are common to all streams, yet there can be no doubt at all that there is a difference of some kind, and as a proof of this may be mentioned the fact that the fish in this stream are found to be, for appearance and quality, vastly superior to those in most other waters. In what the differences consist it is difficult to say, and the mystery seems to have either escaped the attention of our modern chemists, or else to have puzzled them altogether. Probably, because of the properties of the water, or for some other reason, the Saxons and Normans may have manufactured cloth here in small quantities, and fulling mills stood, it is stated, at intervals along the greater part of the banks of the Windrush, before England could be said to be in any way remarkable for the manufacture of woollen goods. Till the 12th century, cloth appears to have been generally made at home by the members of each family, and the superior kinds which could not be produced in this country were sent over from Flanders, the inhabitants of which kingdom appear, in those days, to have been the sole proprietors of the art of making the better kinds of cloth.

It was not till the reign of Edward III that the woollen manufacture became of importance in England. This King, in the earlier years of his reign, as great and wise a monarch as has ever ruled over England, finding that nearly all the wool passed out of the country to Flanders, and was there manufactured into cloth, endeavoured to retain the vast wealth thus produced in this country ; but old Thomas Fuller, in his charmingly quaint History of the Church in Britain, has given a

curious and amusing account of the establishment of this industry in England, which is copied here at length :—

“The King and State,” says Fuller, “began now to grow sensible of the great gain the Netherlands got by our English wool ; in memory whereof the Duke of Burgundy, not long after, instituted the Order of the Golden Fleece, wherein, indeed, the *fleece* was ours, the *golden* theirs,—so vast their emolument by the trade of clothing. Our King, therefore, resolved, if possible, to reduce the trade to his own country, who, as yet, were ignorant of that art, as knowing no more what to do with their wool than the sheep that wear it, as to any artificial and curious drapery ; their best clothes then being no better than friezes, such their coarseness for want of skill in their making. But soon after followed a great alteration, and we shall enlarge ourselves in the manner thereof.”

“The intercourse now being great betwixt the English and the Netherlands, (increased of late, since King Edward married the daughter of the Earl of Hainault), unsuspected emissaries were employed by our King into those countries, who wrought themselves into familiarity with such Dutchmen as were absolute masters of their trade, but not masters of themselves, as either journeymen or apprentices. These bemoaned the slavishness of their poor servants, whom their masters used rather like Heathens than Christians, yea, rather like horses than men ! Early up, and late to bed, and all day hard at work, and harder fare, (a few herrings and mouldy cheese), and all to enrich the churls, their masters, without any profit unto themselves.”

"But, oh ! how happy should they be, if they would but come over into England, bringing their mystery with them, which would provide their welcome in all places ! Here they would feed on fat beef and mutton, till nothing but their fullness would stint their stomachs : yea, they should feed on the labours of their own hands, enjoying a proportionable profit of their pains to themselves ; their beds should be good, and their bed fellows better, seeing the richest yeoman in England would not disdain to marry their daughters unto them, and such the English beauties, that the most envious foreigners could not but commend them."

"Liberty is a lesson quickly conned by heart ; men having a principle within themselves to prompt them, in case they forget it. Persuaded with the premises, many Dutch servants leave their masters, and make over for England. Their departure thence (being pricked here and there) made no sensible vacuity ; but their meeting here all together amounted to a considerable fulness. With themselves, they brought over their trade, and their tools, namely such which could not as yet be so conveniently made in England."

"Happy the yeoman's house into which one of these Dutchmen did enter, bringing industry and wealth along with them. Such who came in strangers within their doors soon after went out bridegrooms, and returned son-in-laws, having married the daughters of their landlords who first entertained them. Yea, those yeomen in whose houses they harboured soon proceeded gentlemen, gaining great estates to themselves, arms and worship to their estates."

"The King having gotten this treasury of foreigners, thought not fit to continue them all in one place, lest on discontent they might embrace a general resolution to return ; but bestowed them through all the part of the land, that clothing thereby might be the better dispersed. Here I say nothing of the colony of the Dutch, who frightened out of their country with an inundation, about the reign of King Henry I, possibly before that nation had attained the cunning of cloth-making, were seated only in Pembrokeshire. This new generation of Dutch was now sprinkled everywhere, so that England (in relation, I mean, to her own countries) may bespeak these inmates in the language of the Poet :—

'Quae regio in terris vestri non plena laboris ?'
Though generally, where left to their own choice, they preferred a maritime habitation.

East.—1, Norfolk, Norwich Fustians ; 2, Suffolk Sudbury Baize ; 3, Essex, Colchester Sayes and Serges 4, Kent, Kentish Broad cloths.

West.—1, Devonshire, Kerseys ; 2, Gloucestershire Cloth ; 3, Worcestershire, Cloth ; 4, Wales Welsh Friezes.

North.—1, Westmoreland, Kendall Cloth ; 2 Lancashire, Manchester Cotton ; 3, Yorkshire, Halifax Cloths.

South.—1, Somersetshire, Taunton Serges ; 2 Hampshire, Cloth ; 3, Berkshire, Cloth ; 4, Sussex, Cloth.

"I am informed that a prime Dutch cloth maker in Gloucestershire, had the surname of Web given him by King Edward, there ; a family still famous for the manufacture. Observe we here, that Mid-England

Northamptonshire, Lincolnshire, and Cambridge, having most wool, have least of clothing therein."

"Here the Dutchman found fuller's earth, a precious treasure, whereof England hath, if not more, better than all Christendom besides ; a great commodity of the quorum of the making good cloth, so that nature may seem to point out our land for the staple of Drapery, if the idleness of her inhabitants be not the only hinderance thereof. This Fuller's earth is clean, contrary to our Jesuits, who are needless drugs, yet still staying here, though daily commanded to depart, whilst Fuller's earth, a precious ware, is daily scoured hence, though by law forbidden to be transported."

"And now was the English wool improved to the highest profit, passing through so many hands, every one having a fleece of the fleece,—sorters, combers, carders, spinsters, weavers, fullers, dyers, pressers, packers, and the manufactures have been heightened to a high perfection, since the cruelty of the Duke Alva drove over more Dutch into England. But enough of this subject, which let none condemn for a deviation from Church History. First, because it would not grieve one to go a little out of the way, if the way be good, as this digression is for the credit and profit of our country. Secondly, it reductively belongeth to the Church History, seeing many poor people, both young and old, formerly charging the parishes (as appeared by the account of the Church Officers) were hereby enabled to maintain themselves.
Fuller's Church History, Vol. I., pp 418-420, ed. 1837."

That some of the foreigners, mentioned above, settled in Witney admits of little doubt, though whether

they came to the little Oxfordshire town as early as the reign of Edward III, is not certain. That they lived in the place during the early part of the reign of Henry VIII is certain, as may be seen by reading in the chapter on Ecclesiastical Witney the names of those who were persecuted for holding religious views, at that time regarded as heretical. John of Brabant, is the particular name which points to the fact that Witney was the habitation of some of the Flemings who came to teach the English the mysteries of the woollen manufacture.

It will be perceived that Fuller does not mention Witney as being engaged in the woollen trade, nor, indeed, any town in Oxfordshire. This is curious, and almost unaccountable. Fuller was a most reliable and veracious historian, and yet it is quite certain that Witney was, at the time he wrote his history, in some measure noted for the manufacture of cloth. In previous chapters, the name of Wenman has been mentioned more than once, and it is certain that this was a very important family, and one which was associated in one way and another, through many generations, with the town of Witney. Now, tradition says, that a certain member of this family was the first man to convey the goods, which he manufactured, to London from Witney by means of drays, or wains, and as the custom of taking surnames was, at the time he made this innovation beginning to arise, he took that of Wain-man, or, as we spell it now, Wenman. There can be no possible doubt that the Wenmans were manufacturers, for old Antony Wood speaks of them as being "clothiers at Witney. They resided, after they retired from business, at Caswel-

House, which was once a fine baronial Mansion or Castle. The evidences that a moat ran round it at one time yet remain. Before this, however, they seemed to have occupied the habitation which formerly stood in Witney "Park."

The story quoted above, which seems so probable, as to warrant the statement that the woollen manufacture actually was carried on here, is not the only evidence that Fuller wrote with insufficient knowledge, when he did not include Witney in the list of those places where the manufacture of wool was carried on. There is the following statement which puts the matter beyond doubt. In the Journals of the House of Lords, the following may be found :—

" 1641. Upon reading the Petition of the Blanket Makers of the towne of Witney, in the County of Oxon, complaining of a patent for the sealing of their Blankets, which is great oppression for them ; it is ordered that the Patent, by which the same are so sealed, shall be brought into this House, and that the Patentees shall appear before their Lordships, on Thursday, the 26th of this instant, and that the patentees shall forbear to lay any imposition upon the said Blankets, made or to be made in that Towne, until the pleasure of this house be further known."

This petition was presented in 1641, and Fuller was probably at this time, busy in writing his history. Nor could the Trade have been altogether unimportant ; the aggrieved Blanket Makers possessed sufficient influence to get their petition presented, and considered, in the House of Lords—no easy matter most likely in those busy

times—a sure indication that the trade was of some consequence. It may be observed, too, with interest, that the particular branch of the woollen trade, which now flourishes here, was, 250 years ago, that which kept the energies of Witney manufacturers engaged. But before this time the manufacture of woollens was so extensive and important that a special “Alnager,” (or cloth searcher) was appointed to inspect the goods made at Witney. This is shown by the following extract from the “Calendar of State Papers, 1591—1594” :—

“1594. Dec. 20. Declaration by Sir George “Delnes and William Fitzwilliam to whom the Queen “has granted the alnage of the new Draperies, by patent “of July last, of their appointment of Rich. Baker, of “Hawstead, Essex, as deputy alnager in that town, (i.e. “Witney), from Xmas to midsummer next, so that he “perform the office honestly, and do not needlessly “molest the subject. Endorsed, John Collier, of Witney, “clothier ; Stephen Collier, of the same place, fuller.”

And if additional proof be wanted, that Fuller spoke with imperfect knowledge, it may be found in the fact that in the Reign of Elizabeth an Act was passed touching the breadth of white woollen cloths made in the Counties of Wilts, Gloucestershire, Somerset, and Oxon. Witney is not, indeed, mentioned in this Act, any more than the places in other counties, but Fuller does not say that the woollen manufacture was carried on in Oxfordshire at all, and, though he wrote some years after the Reign of Elizabeth was over, yet it is most unlikely that the trade disappeared in 50 years or so. Probably Fuller was

ignorant of this part of the Kingdom, though the whole matter is rendered more puzzling, when it is considered that Dr. Jackson, a Rector of Witney, was the historian's great friend. Whether this friendship commenced after the period when Fuller wrote his book, we have not been able to ascertain.

England was, in the Middle Ages, the only wool producing country in the North of Europe. Spain grew wool, but it could not be used without an admixture of English; and there were other reasons why this country had a practical monopoly of the wool trade, apart from its favourable climate and soil. While the farmers in Western Europe were continually interrupted by the ceaseless wars, which were devastating their homesteads, rendering the keeping of sheep an absolute impossibility, England, in spite of outbreaks now and then, was in a fairly peaceful state, and throughout the length and breadth of the land sheep farming was the most important industry, and the export of wool, to Flanders, became of the highest importance. The chief growers of wool at this period were the Cistercian Monks, who owned enormous flocks of sheep. The finest wool at this time, was that grown in Herefordshire, and next to this came that grown in Oxfordshire. Although woollens were manufactured in England extensively, from the time of Edward III, yet all English cloths of importance had to be sent to the Netherlands, for the purpose of being dyed. Owing to the progress made by the Dutch in the cultivation of madder, and also to the fact that, at this period, they possessed the sole secret of pulverizing the

root of this plant, in order to prepare it for use, the dyeing industry did not flourish much in England, and not till the reign of James I did this trade become important in this country.

When blankets were first made at Witney cannot be even conjectured. Thomas a'Blanket set up looms in his house at Bristol, in 1339, and in the same year it was enacted that no wool should be exported. An Act was also passed to protect Thomas a'Blanket, though in what way he needed protection is not clear. Whether this man, to whom everybody in England, and especially Witney people, have reason to be grateful, was in any way associated with the establishment of the making of blankets in this Oxfordshire town, is not known. That Thomas a'Blanket resided here for any lengthened period is unlikely, though the establishment of the manufacture of the article, which goes by his name, may have been due to those who had been taught the secret of the trade by him.

That the manufacture was prosperous towards the end of the 17th century, seems certain, judging from the number of people who were engaged in it. This may be seen by looking at the Tokens, a list of which appears in a previous chapter. For the word "Clothier" must not be taken to signify, as it would now, a man who merely makes clothes, or sells them, but one who was actually engaged in the manufacture of cloth. A petition of the Clothiers, in and around Witney, was also presented in 1641, to the House of Lords, asking that the rights and privileges of the Royal African Company might be protected. The Company, here referred to, was, doubtless

constituted on the lines of the East India Company, which, even at this early period, was fast becoming a huge success. Witney people, no doubt, had extensive dealings, even at that time, with the "dark continent," and if so, this is another proof that at the period named Witney Blankets were well known.

VISIT OF JAMES II.

To Witney, in 1687, came that obstinate Sovereign, James II, after browbeating the Fellows of Magdalen College, Oxford. The latter, as is well known, had the power of choosing as their president any one from among those who had been either Fellows of their Society, or of New College. True it was that on more than one occasion, Sovereigns of England had intimated their wishes in such matters, and on these occasions, it had been customary to respect them. But now James II desired them to elect, as president, a notable libertine, named Anthony Farmer, who in addition to following a dissolute mode of living, was also said to be a Roman Catholic. The Fellows, acting with a courage which distinguished them throughout the struggle, declined to do so, and elected John Hough, a man of eminent virtue and prudence. For this they were cited to appear before the High Commission at Whitehall, where they were treated by Chief Justice Jeffreys after his usual fashion. By this Commission Hough's election was declared null and void, and soon after another Royal letter was sent to the Fellows, commanding them to appoint Parker, Bishop of Oxford, as their President. Again the King's request

was denied ; and finally James decided to set out on a progress, during which he determined to pay the University of Oxford a visit, thinking that the Fellows of Magdalen would not dare to refuse any request he might make of them personally. At the period of this visit he made pleasant excursions to many places which had not long before played an important part in the History of England. Edgehill, not very far from Oxford, was visited amongst other places, and if any thoughts of the wisdom of the course he was adopting came into his mind as he rode over the same ground where his Father, not many years before, had watched the army of the Parliament as they struggled valiantly against his better trained army, they were quickly put on one side by the demonstrations of joy with which he was received in the towns and villages in the neighbourhood. Demonstrations of this kind, which were paid him out of respect for the high office which he held the poor deluded King interpreted as approvals of his object for establishing Papacy in the land and especially of approbation with regard to his policy in the matter of Magdalen College. It is well known how the struggle closed, as, indeed, all contest between right and wrong ought to end. In little more than a year from this time, James II was an exile, living on the bounty of a foreign prince. The following taken from Wood, M.S. D. 19 (3), fo. 86b :—

“In the meantime, the Mayor (of Oxford) and his brethren conducted him beyond S. Giles Church, and then the King bid them return, being wet weather.”

"Afterwards, went to Yarnton, Cassington, and "then to Witney, where they presented him with a pair "of blankets, with golden fringe."

"This progress of the King was supposed to be "taken to ingratiate himself with the people."

But it was not long after this that the most influential of the clothiers of Witney decided to petition for a Company, which should have certain powers in respect to the manufacture of cloth in Witney, and within 20 miles of the town. These Oxfordshire manufacturers were by no means alone, in attempting to found a Company ; it was the great fashion of the time, and it was considered a privilege to be able to obtain such a Charter as they sought. Why this comparatively small country town was able to get such a privilege appears to have been due, either to the good offices of Simon, Earl Harcourt, who lived and owned Cokethorpe, close by, or to the Earl of Clarendon, likewise a neighbour. Of course the ideas, then very generally held, that it was necessary to have restrictions, in order to protect commerce, have been exploded long ago.

ESTABLISHMENT OF THE WITNEY BLANKET COMPANY.

The Charter was granted in 1710, and as Earl Harcourt had done so much for the clothiers of Witney, it was but reasonable that they should ask him to be the High Steward of the New Corporation, which office, we may be sure, was nothing more than a sinecure. The first master was John White, whose tomb may be seen now, near to the Chancel of Coggs Church. The first meeting in connection with the Company was held on the 12th. of January, 1711, the members, whose names

are given, being :—John Dutton, Robert Collier, Edward Busby, Thomas Ffuller, William Marriott, Richard Deane, Thomas Ffreeman, Joseph Basson, Thomas Brooks the Younger, Richard Collins, all of whom are declared to be Blanket Weavers, residing in Witney. At the same court, John Wiggins and John Early were, being both blanket weavers, of Witney aforesaid, admitted into this Company, but as they were Quakers, they made the solemn affirmation or declaration, pursuant to the Act of Parliament in that behalf.

On the first day of the formation of the Company, the Members numbered 15 altogether, but another Court appears to have been held on the next day, and 16 more swelled the ranks, and before the year closed there were many who had sworn to observe the Rules of the Blanket Company, and several, too, were fined for defalcations, the amount forfeited being, in most cases, one shilling.

The second Master was William Early, and the Early family has been ever since bound up with the trade of the town; indeed it is said to be the oldest manufacturing family, of one trade, in any town in England. The lives of two John Earlys, father and son, covered the space of time from 1706 to 1829—123 years, and the latter of the two, born in 1742, with his son lived in their two lives a period of 134 years, to the year 1876: Truly remarkable instances of longevity, and which speak volumes for the hardihood of the stock from which they came, as well as for the healthiness of the calling which they adopted. Whether with modern conditions they would be able to attain such great ages is a question which will not easily be answered.

FINES FOR OFFENCES.

But to proceed with the Minute Book of the Company. On the 4th of December, 1711, within a year of the granting of the Charter, we find the following :—

“Richard Turner was fined five shillings for working “with his apprentice, and employing and working a loom “when a journeyman wanted work, and offered to work “in such loom.”

Then follow many fines for offences against the laws of the Company, such as “making a stockful of blankets, eleven quarters and a half quarter wide,” “for working with his daughter at a loom, and at the same time refusing to give work to a journeyman, who then wanted work.” The fine imposed in the last instance, G. Greenaway, the delinquent, refused to pay, till the wardens began to make preparations for distraining on his goods. Of course, we live in very different times, but, nevertheless, it is extremely difficult to say who could have been the gainers by the absurd restrictions which have been quoted. Undoubtedly, the bringing of Blankets to the Hall to be examined, to ascertain whether they were of the necessary quality, can be easily perceived to have been of service, but apart from this the advantage of so many restrictions is exceedingly puzzling. At the same Court, that Mr. Greenaway met with the displeasure of the Company, there appears another name which is yet honourably known in Witney to this day.

“Edward Dutton is fined twenty shillings for making ‘a stockful of blankets, and stuff for petty coats, thirty ‘six yards long and eight quarters and a half quarter

"wide contrary to the good ordinances and by-laws of
"this Company."

The above is a sample of many fines for similar offences, and what is really curious, and not a little extraordinary, is the fact that, at any rate in the early days of the Company, the fines were remitted with the following remark :—

"It appears to be a mistake on the defaulter's part."

The only fine, at this period in the History of the Company, which seems to have been really imposed, with the exception of the one noted above, and not remitted, was one on the Hall-Keeper, who was mulcted in the sum of five shillings, for neglecting his duty. Still, whether the fines were exacted or not, it is easy to see that now and then there would be those who, perhaps, never wanted a Company at all, and who chafed exceedingly under its discipline. So we find in 1712 one member who actually had the temerity to walk into the room, where the principal officers were assembled, carrying a piece of paper, which was thrown insolently on the table in front of them, and found to be actually "a bill for the charge (which he had of course paid previously) of his admission into the Company," and before the worthy officers had time to recover from their astonishment, the piece of paper was picked up, and the impudent individual had again walked from the room. No wonder he was fined, though whether this was remitted is not known. Still the Company increased, and in 1712, there were as many as 115 on the books; the fines, too, continuing to be inflicted, and the remitting of them also. Mr. Marriott

(whose descendants live in Witney now) appears to have been the greatest offender, and it is amusing to find the number of times he came under the Company's notice, for the very same offence, the fines being remitted in each instance, with the remark, "it appearing to be a mistake on the defaulter's part." There seems, however, to have been the greatest impartiality displayed in the imposing of the fines, for in 1712, the worshipful Master himself, was "ffined two several sums of 20/- for carrying two stockfuls to the Dye House, before the same were brought to the Hall to be weighed."

It is not a little curious, too, that the very first wardens appointed by the Company appear to have been desirous of retaining the fines in their hands, and it was not till proceedings had been commenced against them, that they paid the sums which had been entrusted to their care.

Then after the first two years the imposing of fines was carried on much more strictly, and perhaps as a consequence of this, many weavers appear to have left the town in order to carry on Blanket making where there were no restrictions, and the number on the Books in the year named, went down to 68.

DINNER FOR THE COMPANY.

In 1714, the usual characteristics of Englishmen begin to manifest themselves, and there is the following:—

"It is agreed that Mrs. Townsend be desired to "provide a Dinner for the Company, at the next meeting "following, and the Company will allow sixpence for "every person that dines, out of the Company's stock."

The members appear to have been, at first, accompanied by their wives. This very proper custom, however, did not last long, for in 1721, we have the following entry :—

“At this Meeting it was agreed by the whole Company, that the Feast made by the late Master, at his going out of Office, was by direction of the said Company ; but it is agreed that no Feast shall at any time, hereafter, be made for the wives of the Members of the Company.”

History has mercifully spared us any account of the way in which those who had been so rudely turned away from the Company’s table resented this very improper proceeding. Ways and means were found, doubtless, as they would be now.

Of the discipline, which after the first year became so severe, there is an instance in 1718, when it is stated that “Robert Collier, one of the assistants of this Company, is fined £10 for taking an apprentice before his former apprentice was out of his apprenticeship, so that he has now two apprentices at the same time, which fine he immediately laid down,” (no doubt expecting it would be remitted, but unfortunately for Mr. Collier) “on a vote of the said Company, no part of the same was remitted to him.”

Then from 1720 to 1730, the numbers diminished very considerably, though it does not appear that this affected the general prosperity of the Company, for in 1721 a new Hall was built, in which the weighing and marking of the blankets might go on. Most remarkable is the way in which some of the wardens behaved at this

period, and many are the recorded fines, still more curious is the following entry :—

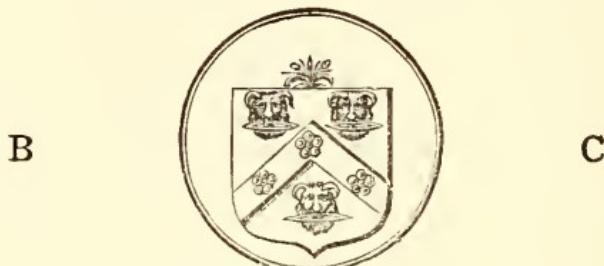
“ 1729. John Wiggins, a member of this Company, “is fined two shillings for abusing and speaking of vile, “indecent, and scurrilous language of the master and “assistants of this Company, in open Court, and “particularly for calling the present master rogue in the “same Court.” And again, in the following year, several members are fined, “for speaking vile and scurrilous “language, and reviling the assistants of the Company.”

The causes which led to the use of the above language are not given, but if the wrath of Mr. Wiggins, and others, proceeded from the ridiculous restrictions such as that concerning the number of apprentices they should keep, or the employing of a journeyman, whether, it may be, they had the money to pay him or not ; and if the language employed was not of a very immoderate nature, we may be, perhaps, excused for sympathizing with the men who were, in the battle of life, hampered in no small degree.

“ 1732. Ordered for the future that the Company’s “dinner be ready on table by 12 of the clock, and that “such of the Company as shall not appear by one of the “clock (whether the books be brought up or not) to be “fined one shilling each, and no excuse, except sickness “or London journeys.”

This Dinner appears to have been held generally in the Feast week, and venison was the principal viand, though, of course, the meat was not confined to this alone, as may be gathered from a number of curious receipts in the possession of Mr. Charles Early, J.P.

The pewter dishes, which were used on these occasions, numbered nearly forty ; the Loving Cup, which is a flagon of solid silver, holding about three pints, may still be seen. On the latter are engraved the



BLANKET MAKERS' ARMS,

With B. on one side, C. on the other ; underneath are the following names :—

THOMAS DOLLEY, MASTER.

ALEX. KENT,
JOHN SHOWEL, } WARDENS.

1732.

And when we imagine the large Hall of the Company ; tables covered with silver and pewter ; on the wall that fine painting of Queen Anne, which is yet to be seen, we may, perhaps, form some little idea of the feasts of the Witney Blanket Weavers 150 years ago. "The London journeys," which are spoken of, were indeed events of a most serious nature. The manufacturer was obliged, in those days, to visit the Metropolis frequently, for the Company possessed a warehouse in London, to which the greater part of the manufacturer's goods were sent, unless he had the good luck to be employed on special orders. So taking an affectionate leave of his family, after, as was generally the

case, making his will, our trader would take the fast Gloucester coach, sleep at Henley, on the way, and so reach London at some indefinite time the next day. His business very often enforced him to stay in town six or seven weeks, after which he would retrace his steps to Witney, his pockets bulky with letters which he brought for his brother manufacturers, in order to save the postage, then no inconsiderable matter.

The failings of the age, too, appear to have crept into the Company, for in 1735 there is the following :—“ Some of the assistants fined ten shillings, ‘ reduced to four shillings, which was spent in wine, with their voluntary consent.’ ”

A remarkably easy way of paying fines, and as the entry was not made, in all probability, for some time, it is pardonable to wonder if the fine of ten shillings was reduced to four, after the wine had been discussed. Was it, too, on such an occasion, when the liquor had made the Members more than usually sensible of their own importance, that the following solitary resolution was passed ?

“ That any person who seeks out the secrets of this Company shall meet with the Company’s displeasure.”

Really one is puzzled to know what the secrets could have been, still more in what manner the Company could have made “ their displeasure ” felt by those who resumed to gain knowledge respecting the manufacture of blankets.

It is clear, from the following entry, that there were those who did try to break through the restrictions of the Company.

" 1738. Ordered by this Court that the Wardens
" give notice forthwith unto John Coxeter and Thomas
" Silky, not to presume to follow the trade of Blanket
" Weavers in Witney, or within 20 miles thereof, and in
" case they shall presume to offend against this order, it
" is further ordered that an action be brought in the name
" of this Company, to recover the several penalties by
" them respectively incurred, by not observing the
" By-laws of this Company, as well as for all past offences,
" as for those which shall hereafter be committed, the
" expenses whereof to be paid by the Master for the time
" being, out of the stock of this Company."

In the same year, too, there is the following entry :—

" This day, William Bird came and desired to have
" Jason Shepherd, his apprentice, turned over to serve
" the remainder of his term to Mr. Shuffrey; but Bird
" and Shuffrey (both being in arrear) refused to pay their
" dues to the Hall, and the said Bird refused to give
" note not to take another apprentice until his present
" apprentice's term was expired. After several question-
" for and against it, Bird declared that he had wool
" enough and yarn enough, and would immediately sett
" to work and make blankets, but would never bring
" any more goods to the Hall of this Company."

It will be easily perceived that it was a very great inconvenience to be obliged to come to the Company's Hall about such small matters, as the turning over of an apprentice to another manufacturer, it may also have been inconvenient to pay the dues which the Company demanded. In these matters it is right to sympathise with Mr. Bird, and also with respect to the

determination to work for the future, without being hedged in with ridiculous regulations ; only with regard to the latter, it is quite certain that the Company *had* power to prevent him carrying his threats into execution, at any rate within 20 miles of Witney ; but when the same weaver goes on to use opprobrious language, even to call the Master "fool," and that not secretly, but "in open court," where all might hear, and afterwards discuss such a serious matter from one end of the town to the other, then there can be little doubt but that Mr. Bird overstepped the bounds of discretion altogether.

The trade, however, continued and prospered in spite of the impeding conditions under which it was carried on ; but it is not till 1769 that we get any information, from an outside point of view, of the woollen manufacture at Witney : then there is the following account :—

" Being so near Witney, we could not forbear taking a ride to see a town so noted for the manufacture of blanketing and rugs, which thrive here in a most extraordinary manner. Here are at work 150 looms, continually, for which above 3,000 people, from eight years old and upwards, are daily employed in carding, spinning, &c., and consume above 100 packs of wool weekly. The blankets are usually ten or twelve quarters wide, and very white, which some attribute to the abstersive nitrous waters of the river Windrush, wherewith they are scoured, but others believe it is owing to a peculiar way of loose spinning they use here, and others again, are of opinion that it proceeds from both. But, however that may be, this town has ingrossed the whole trade in this commodity. They likewise make here the Duffield Stuffs, a yard and three quarters wide, which are carried to New England and Virginia, and much worn, even here, in winter "

" Here are likewise a great many fellmongers, who having dressed and stained their sheep skins, make them into jackets and breeches

and sell them at Bampton ; from whence they are dispersed all over the neighbouring counties. Here is a good free school and fine library belonging to it. Witney is an ancient town, and was of good repute before the Norman invasion, but it is a long, straggling, uncouth place, though full of inhabitants. 'Twas one of the manors which Alwinus, bishop of Winchester, gave to the Church of St. Swithin there, on Queen Emma's happily passing the fire ordeal. Southward lies Bampton, on the borders of the county next Berkshire. It is an ancient market town, likewise in repute before the Norman invasion. It is noted for the greatest market for fellmonger wares in England which come from Witney."

We are able, also, to trace some of those who succeeded Earl Harcourt in the office of High Steward ; for newspapers began to appear in the course of the early part of the 18th century, and from the old columns of one, we extract the following :—

"Janry 3rd, 1754. On Monday last the Master and
"some of the Assistants of the Company of Blanket
"Weavers, inhabiting Witney, or within 20 miles thereof,
"attended by the Clerk to the said Company, waited on
"his Grace the Duke of Marlborough, at Blenheim, by
"desire of the whole Company, to beg that his Grace
"would do the Company the honour to accept the Office
"of High Steward of the said Company, then vacant by
"the death of their worthy benefactor, the Earl of
"Clarendon and Rochester, their late High Steward,
"which office his Grace was most graciously pleased to
"accept."

And as the Duke was pleased, the report goes on to say, to entertain the whole company at dinner, "in the most elegant manner," the function, as we should now call it, was doubtless a very pleasing one.

The Government, too, appear to have paid some attention to the desires of the Witney manufacturers, for in 1775, when the latter petitioned with respect to the duty on rape seed, the oil from which was then extensively used in the making of blankets, the exactions were taken off.

A great day it was, in 1788, when John Early, the Master, and many others belonging to the Company, set out for Nuneham, in order to present to King George and Queen Charlotte a pair of blankets, as a token of their esteem. With regard to the details of this visit nothing is recorded. Nuneham Court was then, as now, occupied by the Harcourt family, who had more than a century before pulled down their house at Stanton Harcourt, in order to erect a still more stately mansion at Nuneham, and it was to visit them that the King and Queen came to this part of the country.

HOW BLANKETS WERE MANUFACTURED A CENTURY AGO.

It is possible, from a written description which an old townsman left behind him, to show, in some manner, how Witney manufacturers carried on their business in the latter part of the last century and the beginning of the present. It was a time of revolutionary changes, so far as the woollen manufacture was concerned. Arkwright and Compton were at this very time perfecting their Cotton spinning frames; Peel and Hurst were bringing new and ingenious inventions to bear upon the woollen manufacture; James Watt, too, was perfecting the Steam Engine, and revolutionizing almost all industries. But these innovations did not

touch Witney for a long time. The trade was carried on for some years after the 19th century dawned in the same way as it had been for centuries.

Our Witney manufacturer was then up at 3 or 4 o'clock in the morning, loading his packhorse with wool and oil, though, if he were fortunate enough to possess a cart, this was used instead. The wool and oil were taken to all the towns and villages in the neighbourhood within a distance of several miles, even extending to Aldsworth, in Gloucestershire. The women of a village being assembled, generally in a barn lent for the occasion, received an allotted quantity of wool and oil, and brought in what they had spun since the previous visit, made up in bundles—pads they were called—and these pads were afterwards stored up by the manufacturer till he had occasion to use them. Most of the spinning was done in the winter months, for then the agricultural labourer was not required so much in the fields. It was usual for the husband and big boys to card the wool, and for the women and girls to spin it. The machinery used was the good old humming wheel, and many an old woman whose work, so far as most other active pursuits were concerned, was at an end, could earn sufficient to keep her from the dreaded Poorhouse. So we can picture many a family engaged in the manner indicated, working through the long winter evenings, with no other light than that afforded by a bunch of rushes, which had been dipped in tallow. The woollen manufacture, it will be seen, was carried on then under far healthier conditions than it is now. There were no great factories filled with engines of all

shapes and sizes, and the only mill then known, was one for fulling ; the wool was converted into yarn, quietly and peacefully at home, where in the day time the inmates might see the flowers of the garden instead of the movements of machinery, hissing and groaning under their eyes. It will be easily seen that steam has robbed this part of the country in no small degree, for the agricultural labourer has now, in the winter evenings, very little to engage his attention. How different was it when, after his work in the fields, he was able to trudge home, seat himself in the midst of his family, and with their help, not only amuse himself, but earn also a sum, which though not large, was yet of no small importance to him. This is a long time ago, so long that there are few, if any, who can remember when the system was fully in use, and with the death of the remembrance of it there has also departed all knowledge of the benefits which it conferred. Nevertheless, the loss to the agricultural labourers has been heavy, and there is no remedy. Of course there was a good deal of rivalry between the various manufacturers with respect to the spinners ; a man's trade depended entirely upon the amount of spinning which he could get executed, and so it will be easily imagined that many an angry feud has been occasioned by one manufacturer poaching on what may be termed another's village preserves. The pads of yarn were twisted up with a thick stick, and this led to a curious custom of the Quill winders, who were accustomed to preserve these sticks, and present them to the wife of the manufacturer, claiming, what seems not to have been refused, a jolification of pancakes and ale

on Shrove Tuesday. The Tuckers of Messrs C. Early and Co have a dinner now, every Shrove Tuesday, at which it is usual for the head of the firm to preside.

In those days the apprentices dined with the family and "roly-poly" pudding was served first; those who had most pudding being allowed to have most meat, though, probably, the custom resulted in a judicious saving of the latter.

The Company still existed; every manufacturer being, as of old, obliged to make his blankets of a particular weight, and compelled to take them, when finished, to the Blanket Hall to be stamped with the Company's seal; and every apprentice being still sworn in on the Bible, which Mr. John White, the first Master, presented to the Company. But the competition with the machinery of the North was beginning to tell a tale, the trade began to languish, many failures took place, and had not Witney had the good fortune to have possessed some inhabitants of remarkable enterprise, every vestige of the trade would have departed. As it was, several of the most intelligent went to Newbury, so as to be out of the reach of the absurd regulations. So long as the system could be carried on properly, it was beneficial in compelling the manufacturer to produce a good article, and perhaps it was during the existence of the Company that Witney blankets became renowned for their excellence; but when competition with a cheaper article, which the men of the North produced, first appeared, it marked the period when the Witney Blanket Company ceased to be of service. The members, however, continued to meet,

at any rate for the Annual Feast. A few of the old manufacturers, at this festive gathering, still hurled threats at those who began openly to break the regulations, and soon, as a writer, whom I have before quoted, observes, "they were engaged in discussing not the quality of the blankets, but other matters, which would prepare them for sleep in any blankets." The Company was finally dissolved in 1847.

It has been stated that the entire woollen industry would have departed from Witney long ago had it not been for the enterprise of some of its inhabitants, and surely, in any history of the place they so much benefitted their names should be recorded, and, so far as may be, a slight mention made of the work they accomplished in saving the trade of the town.

FIRST INTRODUCTION OF MACHINERY.

The first effort made at Witney to initiate the machinery, which had done such wonders to the North of England, consisted of an engine, turned by two men, with a handle on each side of the cylinder. This was followed by a gigantic cog-wheel, propelled by a handle, and, it is probable, there may be those yet living who remember when these wheels were in use. Edmund Wright and Thomas Townsend were two of the first manufacturers to employ machinery. The former was unfortunately killed by falling into the pit of the wheel at New Mills. Many stories were soon circulated with reference to his supposed re-appearance, while the people in the villages round (who perceived that if the introduction of machinery were attended with

good results their services would not be required in the making of yarn) were not slow to attribute his death to a judgment from Heaven for seeking to take away their work. A plain stone in the old Churchyard, on the way to the station, marks Mr. Wright's last resting place. Other members of the family have since left evidences of the regard in which they hold Witney, (though they no longer live there) to which reference will be made later on. The foresight of Mr. William Long had much to do with the success of the trade in the first two decades of the present century, and when in 1818 New Mills were burnt down, they were erected again by Paul Harris, and Edward and John Early, and vastly improved machinery was also introduced ; in fact the effort made at New Mills at this time may be regarded as the first serious attempt to endeavour to compete with the North of England.

BLANKET MANUFACTURE TO-DAY.

Since that time the staple trade of Witney has rapidly progressed, and to-day, thanks to the enterprise of Messrs. Early, and Messrs. Smith, which firms have been so long and so honourably associated with the town and trade, Witney stands foremost in the blanket trade, and its reputation for the excellence of the goods manufactured is greater than ever. The manufacturers of to-day spare neither pains nor expense to secure the best machinery which modern skill has invented ; and now instead of the simple handy-work of the villagers, with their batting cards and humming wheels, they have large factories, driven by steam and water power. The wool passes through the various processes of willeying,

oiling, feeding, scribbling, carding, condensing, till the self-acting mule completes the thread, and turns it out ready for the warping machine and the power loom. In the olden times the weaver's looms were of a very primitive construction ; the journeyman standing on one side, and the apprentice on the other, threw the shuttle across from one to the other. A great improvement on this was made in the "Spring Loom," by which one man was able to do the work of two ; and now, in these modern days, the hand loom has been superceded by the power loom ; and in the after processes of finishing, modern machinery enables the manufacturers to produce a much more sightly article than could his predecessors in olden times.

The qualities, which at the present time specially commend the Witney Blankets, are color, softness, fulness in hand, warmth without weight, and durability. And though the present day rage for cheapness has obliged the manufacturers of 1894 to produce a lower article than his predecessors of 1694, yet those who act on the wise axiom, "the best is the cheapest," will be able to procure Witney Blankets of present day make, possessing all the intrinsic qualities of those of former times, but with vastly improved appearance. The restrictions of former times, under the old Company, may, or may not, have had their beneficial uses, but they would be simply intolerable now, and the Witney manufacturer of to-day, unshackled by these, is free to make the goods which he finds to be most suited to the various markets of the world. Witney manufacturing now stands in the front rank, and is rapidly increasing.

THE BLANKET COMPANY'S CHARTER.

Copy of Letters, Patents to Company of Blanket Weavers, 23rd May, 10th., of Queen Ann, 1710:—

"Ann by the grace of God, of Great Britain, France
"and Ireland, queen, defender of the Faith, and so
"forth:—To all to whom these presents shall come,
"greeting,—Whereas divers of our well beloved subjects,
"the blankett weavers, inhabiting in and near Witney,
"in our county of Oxon, in behalf of themselves and
"others following the said trade, complaining of many
"frauds, and abuses of late practiced in the deceitful
"working up of blanketts, to the great scandal,
"impoverishment, and decay of the said trade, and the
"manufacturers thereof, which for want of some
"established government amongst them, they are not
"able to prevent; and having therefore by their
"petition humbly prayed us to be incorporated, for the
"preservation and improvement of the said trade and
"manufacture, with such powers and restrictions, as to
"us should seem meet: Wee, being willing to encourage
"and promote all arts and manufactures, tending to the
"public good, are graciously pleased to condescend to
"their request. Know ye, therefore that wee of our
"especial grace, certain knowledge, and meer motion,
"have granted, constituted, declared, ordained, and
"appointed, and by these presents, for us, our heirs and
"successors, doe grant, constitute, declare, ordain, and
"appoint that all, and every such persons, who are
"qualified by law, as blankett weavers, to use and
"exercise the art and mistery of blankett weaving in
"Witney, aforesaid, or twenty miles round the same, be

"incorporated by the name of the Master, Assistant,
"Wardens, and Commonalty of blankett weavers,
"inhabiting in Witney, in the county of Oxon, or
"within twenty miles thereof, and them by the name of
"the Master, Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty of
"blankett weavers, inhabiting in Witney, in the county
"of Oxon, or within twenty miles thereof, we do really
"and fully, for us our heirs and successors, make, erect,
"ordain, constitute, establish, confirm, and declare, by
"these presents, to be one body, corporate and politick
"in deed, and in name for ever. And we do hereby for
"us, our heirs, and successors, grant and declare, that by
"the same name of the Master, Assistants, Wardens, and
"Commonalty of blankett weavers, inhabiting in
"Witney, in the county of Oxon, or within twenty
"miles thereof, they shall have perpetual succession, and
"by that name for ever hereafter, shall, and may plead,
"and be impleaded, sue, and be sued, answer and be
"answered unto, defend and be defended, in whatsoever
"courts and places, and before any judges, justices, and
"officers of us, our heirs and successors, in all, and singular
"actions, pleas, suits, matters, and demands of what
"nature, kind, or quality soever they shall be, in the
"same manner and form, and as fully, and as amply, as
"any of our subjects, within that part of our united
"kingdom of Great Britain, called England, may or can
"do, plead or be impleaded, sue, or be sued, answer or
"be answered unto, defend or be defended. And that
"the said Company of the Master, Assistants, Wardens,
"commonalty of blankett weavers, inhabiting in Witney,
"in the county of Oxon, or within twenty miles thereof,

"and their successors for ever hereafter, shall and may
"have, and use a common seal for the affairs, and
"business of the said Corporation: and the same seal
"from time to time, at their will and pleasure, break,
"change, alter or make new, as to them shall seem
"expedient. And further, for the due and orderly
"regulating and government of the said corporation,
"hereby made and erected, we will, and by these
"presents for us, our heirs and successors, do grant,
"declare, ordain, and appoint, that from henceforth, for
"ever there shall be a High Steward, one Master, eight
"or more Assistants, and two Wardens of the said
"Company. The said assistants not to exceed twenty
"in number, to be constituted, and chosen in such a
"manner, as hereafter in these presents is expressed, and
"specified. And for the better execution of our royal
"will and pleasure, herein we have made,
"ordained, nominated, constituted, and appointed,
"and by these presents, for us our heirs and
"successors, make, nominate, constitute, and appoint
"our right trusty and well-beloved cousin, and
"councillor, Henry, Earl of Rochester, to be the
"first and present High Steward of the said Company,
"to continue during his life. And that all future High
"Stewards of the said Company shall and may be elected
"by the Master, Assistants, and Wardens of the said
"Company for the time being, or the major part of
"them, whereof the Master to be one, on two days'
"notice in court assembled, and to continue during life."

"And we have made, ordained, nominated,
"constituted, and appointed and by these presents, for

"us our heirs and successors, make, ordain, nominate,
"constitute, and appoint our well beloved subject, John
"White, senior, to be the first and present Master of the
"said Company, hereby incorporated, to continue in the
"said office till the Monday before the first day of
"Michaelmas term next, ensuing, the date of these
"presents, and from thence until some other fit person
"shall be duly elected, sworn and admitted into the said
"office."

"And we have likewise made, ordained, nominated,
"constituted, and appointed, and do, by these presents,
"for us our heirs and successors, make, ordain, nominate,
"constitute, and appoint, our well beloved subjects,
"Thomas Early, Thomas Johnson, Edward Bird,
"Michael Boughin, William Rogers, William Jones,
"William Townsend, Thomas Boulton, and the said
"Master to be the first and present Assistants of the said
"Company. To hold and enjoy their said several and
"respective offices, for and during their said several and
"respective lives, unless they, or any of them, shall
"happen to be removed for reasonable and just cause by
"the Master, Assistants, and Wardens of the said
"Company for the time being, or the major part of
"them (whereof the master to be one), on two days'
"notice, in court assembled. To whom we do hereby,
"for us our heirs and successors, give full power and
"authority to remove any of the said assistants of the
"said Company from time to time, accordingly."

"And we have also made, ordained, nominated,
"constituted, and appointed, and do by these presents,
"for us our heirs and successors, make, ordain, nominate,

"constitute, and appoint, our well beloved subjects
"William Boughin and John Cowell, to be the first and
"present Wardens of the said Company, to continue in
"their said respective offices till the Monday before the
"first day of Michaelmas Term next, ensuing, the date
"of these presents, and from thence until other fit
"persons shall be duly elected, sworn and admitted into
"the said office. And further, we will and by these
"presents, for us our heirs and successors do grant to the
"Master, Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty of
"blankett weavers, inhabiting in Witney, in the county
"of Oxon, or within twenty miles thereof aforesaid, and
"their successors for ever shall and may have one honest
"and discreet person to be clerk of the said Company;
"and we have assigned, nominated, constituted and
"appointed, and by these presents for us our heirs and
"successors, do assign, nominate, constitute, and appoint
"our well beloved subject, James Hall, gent, to be the
"first and present clerk of the said Company by himself
"or his sufficient deputy for and during his life, unless
"he happen to be removed, for reasonable and just
"cause, by the Master, Assistants and Wardens of the
"said Company, for the time being, or the major part of
"them, (whereof the master to be one) on two days'
"notice in court assembled, to whom we do hereby for
"us, our heirs and successors, give full power and
"authority to remove the clerk of the said Company
"from time to time, accordingly. And that after the
"death or removal of the said James Hall, all future
"clerks of the said Company shall and may be, from
"time to time, chosen by the Master, Assistants and

"Wardens of the said Company, for the time being, or
"the major part of them, (whereof the master to be one)
"on two days' notice in court assembled, and shall hold
"and enjoy the said office during the pleasure of the
"Master, Assistants and Wardens of the said Company.
"And we do hereby, for us our heirs and successors,
"grant unto the Master, Assistants and Wardens, and
"Commonalty of blankett weavers, inhabiting in
"Witney, in the county of Oxon, or within twenty
"miles thereof, aforesaid, and their successors, that it
"shall and may be lawful to and for the Master,
"Assistants and Wardens of the said Company for the
"time being, or the major part of them (whereof the
"master to be one), on two days' notice, in court
"assembled, to elect yearly on the Monday before the
"first day Michaelmas term, or within fourteen days
"after, a Master out of the Assistants of the said
"Company, and the two Wardens out of the Commonalty
"thereof. And that it shall and may be lawful to and
"for Assistants of the said Company, or the major part
"of them, upon due notice to all the assistants thereof,
"from time to time, upon the death of the Master or
"Wardens of the said Company, to choose another
"Master out of the Assistants of the said Company, and
"other Wardens out of the Commonalty thereof. And
"that such persons as shall have served the office of
"Master or Warden, be capable of being chosen Master
"or Warden again. And our will and pleasure is, and
"we do hereby, for us our heirs and successors, ordain
"and appoint, that upon the death or removal of any of
"the Assistants of the said Company, it shall and may be

"lawful to and for the Master, Assistants and Wardens
"of the said Company, for the time being, or the major
"part of them, (whereof the Master to be one), in
"two days' notice, in court assembled, to elect
"others in their places, out of the Wardens and
"Commonalty of the said Company. And that the said
"court shall, and may, make up the number of the
"Assistants (twenty), when they shall see occasion. And
"likewise that it shall, and may be lawful to, and for the
"Master, Assistants, and Wardens, of the said Company,
"for the time being, or the major part of them, whereof
"the Master to be one, on two days notice, in court
"assembled, from time to time, to choose, and continue
"all inferior offices, at their will and pleasure. And of
"our special grace, certain knowledge, and meer motion,
"we have granted, ordained, and appointed, and by
"those presents for us, our heirs, and successors do grant,
"ordain, and appoint, that it shall, and may be lawful, to
"and for the master, assistants, and wardens, of the said
"Company, for the time being, or the major part of
"them, from time to time, to admit into the said
"Company, all and every person, and persons inhabiting
"within or without the limits aforesaid, being duly
"qualified to use and exercise the said art and mystery,
"who shall desire to become members of the said
"Company, and that no person be admitted to any office
"belonging to the said Company, until he shall have
"taken an oath for the due execution thereof, as
"hereafter in those presents is directed. And we do
"hereby, for us our heirs and successors, ordain, direct
"and appoint, that the present Master, and Assistants o

the said Company shall, before they be admitted to their several and respective offices, take an oath for the due execution of the same, before one or more justice, or justices, of the peace in our said county of Oxon, to whom we do by these presents, for us our heirs and successors, give full power and authority to administer the same accordingly. And that afterwards the Wardens shall, in like manner, before they be admitted to their respective offices, take an oath for the due execution of the same, before the Master and Assistants of the said Company, or the major part of them, to whom we do by these presents, for us, our heirs and successors, give full power and authority to administer the same accordingly. And that for the future, it shall and may be lawful, to and for the Assistants of the said Company, or any three of them, to administer such oath to the Master, and the Master afterwards to the Assistants, and the Master or Assistants, or any three of them afterwards to the Warden, or any other officer belonging to the said Company. To all and each of whom we do hereby, for us our heirs and successors, give full power and authority to administer the same accordingly, and we do hereby, for us our heirs and successors, give and grant unto the Master, Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty of blankett weavers, inhabiting in Witney, in the county of Oxon, or within twenty miles thereof, aforesaid, or their successors, or the major part of them, whereof the Master to be one, on two days' notice, full power and authority to keep a court where, when, and as often as they shall see convenient, within the limits aforesaid.

" And that it shall, and may be lawful, to and for the
" said Master, Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty, or
" the major part of them, in a general court, assembled
" there to consult, concerning the affairs and business of
" the said Company, and to prepare, make, ordain, and
" constitute, such, and so many good and wholesome
" by-laws, rules, orders, and ordinances for the regulating
" of the said trade, and preventing abuses therein, by the
" members of the said Company, and for the well
" ordering, rule, and government of the said Company,
" and the members thereof, and also to set, impose, and
" inflict reasonable pains, penalties, and punishments,
" fines, amerciaments, or otherwise upon such offender or
" offenders, as shall transgress, break, or violate the said
" by-laws, rules, orders, or ordinances, so to be made as
" aforesaid. And likewise that it shall and may be
" lawful, to and for the said Court, the said by-laws,
" rules, orders, or ordinances to alter, annul, or make
" void, as to them shall seem expedient. Provided
" always that the said by-laws, rules, orders, and
" ordinances, be reasonable, and not repugnant, or
" contrary to law. And we do hereby, for us, our heirs
" and successors, grant unto the Master, Assistants, and
" Wardens of the said Company for the time being,
" whereof the Master for the time being to be one, full
" power and authority, to put the said by-laws, rules,
" orders, and ordinances in execution, and the said pains
" and penalties, from time to time, to mitigate or remit,
" as to them shall seem meet and expedient, which said
" fines and amerciaments, we will, and do hereby, for us
" our heirs and successors, grant, shall and may be levied

"sued for, taken, retained, and recovered by the Master,
"Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty of blankett
"weavers, inhabiting in Witney, in the county of Oxon,
"or within twenty miles thereof. To the sole use,
"benefit and advantage of the Master, Assistants, Wardens
"and Commonalty of blankett weavers, inhabiting in
"Witney, in the county of Oxon, or within twenty
"miles thereof, aforesaid, and their successors, without
"any account or accounts, to be rendered to us, our
"heirs or successors for the same. All and singular,
"which said by-laws, rules, orders, and ordinances, so as
"aforesaid to be made, we do hereby for us, our heirs,
"and successors, will and command shall be duly
"observed and kept, under the pains and penalties
"therein contained. And we do hereby, for us our
"heirs and successors, will and require, authorize,
"and command all, and singular, our Judges, Justices of
"Peace, Mayors, Sheriffs, Bailiffs, Constables, Head-
"boroughs, and all other, the Officers and Ministers,
"whatsoever, of us our heirs respectively be, from time
"to time, in their several and respective offices, favouring
"aiding, and assisting unto the Master, Assistants,
"Wardens and Commonalty of blankett weavers,
"inhabiting in Witney, in the county of Oxon, or
"within twenty miles thereof, aforesaid, and their
"successors, their officers, agents, and servants in all
"things, as becometh, according to our Royal will and
"pleasure, herein declared, and the true intent and
"meaning of these presents. And lastly, we do hereby,
"for us our heirs and successors, grant unto the Master,
"Assistants, Wardens, and Commonalty of blankett

"weavers inhabiting Witney, in the county of Oxon, or
"within twenty miles therof, aforesaid, and their
"successors, that these, our letters pattsents, or the
"inrollment thereof, shall be in and by all things good,
"firm, valid, sufficient, and effectual in the law, according
"to the true intent and meaning thereof, and shall be
"taken, construed, and adjudged, in the most favourable
"and benefical sense, for the best advantage of the said
"Company and their successors, as well in all our courts
"of record elsewhere, and by all, and singular, the
"officers and ministers whatsoever of us, our heirs and
"successors, notwithstanding any defect, incertainty,
"omission or imperfection in these, our letters pattsents,
"or any other matter, cause, or thing whatsoever to the
"contrary, in anywise, notwithstanding."

"In witness whereof we have caused these, our
letters, to be made pattsents."

"Witness ourself at Westminster, the three and
twentieth day of May, in the tenth year of our reign.
By write of privy seal. Corks."





CHAPTER V.

The Court Leet and Borough Records.

ALTHOUGH, now, the Court Leet at Witney is called together with very little other object than that of keeping up an old custom, all its important uses having been abolished by the County Magistracy, County Council, and Local Board, yet it was at one time the most important, as it is the most ancient, of any Court in our Constitution. It consisted mainly of a jury, presided over by a Steward, who in this, acted as Deputy to the Lord of the Manor, the latter representing the authority of the Crown. As was pointed out in a previous Chapter, the Saxon had the most workable form of local self-government which the world has ever seen. But when Norman William came, with his band of conquerors, the good elective machinery of the Saxons was abolished, and as the collection of taxes was the main object, at first, of Norman government, the principal official seems to have

been the Chancellor of the Exchequer. So instead of officials, who had been known as Sheriffs in Saxon times, there came others, with such names as indicate their origin—Viscounts, i.e. *Vicecomites*, and for those, who had in happier days presided over Boroughs such as Witney, there arose others who were called Provosts, but whether Viscounts or Provosts the work they were obliged to engage themselves in was essentially the same, namely, that of grinding every penny they could from the unfortunate English. Of course this was only for a time; a period soon arrived when the distinction between Norman and Englishman ceased to exist, and then the Government which ensued was an imitation of what had existed in an earlier age. Perhaps it was in Norman days that the Court Leet of Witney was constituted, for the word Bailiff (the name for the chief official of the Court Leet) is said to be of Norman origin, and a corruption of Bailwickreve, or it may have been that when the Saxon form of Government was in some measure restored, that the name Bailiff was still retained instead of the more ancient Borough-reeve.

No doubt the Bailiffs of Witney were elected openly, as were our Members of Parliament till election by ballot was adopted; and if the scenes which took place at the hustings resembled those which are just beginning to die out of memory, when representatives for St. Stephen's were chosen by open voting, the necessity of electing these officials at a Court Leet will be well understood. Perhaps the introduction of the blanket manufacture altered ancient good manners, and elections which had at one time been carried on in a

very proper manner became remarkable for scenes of disorder. However this may have been, certain it is that election by Court Leet gradually superseded open voting. Here a jury, which may be described as fairly representative of the town, chose the man, or men, who were to preside over the Court, which in those days had so much to do with the life of towns such as Witney. It is said that History does but repeat itself, and here is an exemplification of the fact, for, probably, soon after this book first comes into print the people of Witney, and of other places, will be engaged in selecting those who will, in some measure, rule over them, though there will be a difference in the amount of jurisdiction which the Court Leet anciently possessed, and that with which it is proposed to endow our Parish Councils; the larger power being, singularly, again placed in the hands of almost the same class of persons as those who ruled in the Courts of nearly ten centuries ago. This, after the lapse of a thousand years. Truly the ages move slowly. But the powers which the Court Leet possessed were enormous, the principle on which they were constituted being that every man should have at his own door an authority for the redress of wrongs. Much of the business which is now carried on at our County Councils and Quarter Sessions, the Court Leet was in days of yore empowered to deal with, and as will be seen from the extracts, which have been taken from the borough records, many and various were the offences which wanted consideration. Bakers, who, even in those days required the terrors of the law to compel them to act honestly. Brewers, too, who were not fair

dealers, met with its displeasure. Witney was celebrated in old times for beer, as well as for bread, and it may be certain that the Conscript Fathers were strict enough in all regulations with respect to the production of both these articles of diet. Offenders were dealt with in the manner peculiar to the time, not by being fined a few shillings, as now, but by the more drastic measure of having an ear nailed to the pillory, though there are no traces at all of this in the Witney records, yet they may be found elsewhere. Drunkards were also, by the orders of Court Leet, placed in the stocks ; even common scolds were put in the ducking stool, and those too fond of idle scandal, were silenced by means of the Gossip's bridle. Truly it is doubtful, after all, if everyone in Witney, of both sexes, will agree with some authorities, who declare that this Court was one of the most beneficial of any that have ever existed in the land. Not the least of the merits of this Court is thus stated by a panegyrist, "The proceedings of the Leet are without expense, the suitor pays no fees, and advocates or attorneys never enter it." (*Ritson's Court Leet.*)

The borough of Witney was anciently governed by the Stewards and Bailiffs of the Bishops of Winchester, with constables, wardsmen, and other officers as body corporate. They held Court every three weeks, and as may be seen from some of the extracts which follow, they had jurisdiction in all civil cases for sums under forty shillings, and they appear also to have had some amount of authority in minor criminal offences. The Sheriff could serve no writ within the borough, but

through the hands of the Bailiffs. The latter, together with such other persons as had passed that office, formed the magisterial bench, and sat in their own Guild-Hall.

The Records of the transactions of Witney Court Leet are preserved as far back as the year 1538, the first entry being headed "The nine and twentieth yere of the reyne of our soverente lorde Kynge hary the VIII." Of course, many of the entries made then, though doubtless of interest, and of value to those who were alive at the period they were written, are of little moment to us in these later days, and many years' transactions have to be searched before one item is brought to light which possesses any interest for us now.

"1547. Randowth Margaras comythe to the Courte ye 27 day of October, and bryngythe hys surte for good order to kepe in hys howse."

There are many other entries to the same effect, with respect to other persons, and one who disregarded the order respecting the sureties was mulcted in the sum of three shillings and four pence. We are not told who the particular persons were, who were required to bring these sureties for good behaviour; it is more than likely, however, they were inn-holders; or they may have been those, who had in times before, proved themselves wanting in prudence.

Our forefathers, with a wisdom which deserves to be more rigorously imitated in the later days, were exceedingly particular in all matters which concerned the good of the people. At all times did they exercise

a controlling hand over what were the two articles which formed so largely the diet of former days—bread and

BEER.

So in 1549 there is the following entry :—

“At a Cortt holden ye 19 day of April, hytt ys agreed byffore ye Cort, ffor ye assysse of Ale, to sell ytt yff hytt be good, and holssomly brewed, to be rated at 2od. ye dossin.”

“A order taken att ye same courte ffor ye assise of alle. Item, ytt every brewer sshawle brew good and holssome alle, and to ssell from and after this day by order of the same courte, every dossen of alle beynge brewed, ye som off 2s. 1d. ye dossen, and ye typlar to sell one thurdynsdale (three pints) off good alle' at $\frac{1}{2}d.$ ”

“Item, also ytt is agreed by order of the same courte ytt every brewer shall provide for ye comfort off ye pore people, good and holesome drynke, and to allow a gawne and a half ffor a 1d., and every brewer to allow of small drynke ffor ye brewyng off a quarter off mawlt 12 gawnes (gallons).”

It will be perceived, from the above entries, that interference with the liquor trade is of no modern date, and that not only was the price of ale settled by a Court, which sat especially for deciding matters connected with brewing, but that the amount of malt, which should be used, was also determined. In the next year, to the one quoted above, the officials go still further, and recognizing, perhaps, that those who preferred to have

heir beer at home, should be encouraged, there is the following :—

“1550. A decre made at this Courte that all brewsters in this towne, shall sell a dozen of ale not above iis. viiid., and the ganykar (innkeeper) shall sell a hurdyndale for a peny, as well within the dore, as wt owte the dore.”

It is probable that the order made above, was attended with good results, for in the next year there is the following :—

“A decre made by the baylis that all brewsters shall sell a dossene of ale for xxiid., and the ganykar shall selle a quart of good ale owte of the dore, for a halfpenny, and a thurdyndale of good ale within the dore for a penny, and half a thurdyndale within the dore for a halfpenny.”

But those connected with the brewing interest appear then to have resented these restrictions of the ruling bodies, and it is easy to see from this resolution, passed in the following year, what particular means they adopted for manifesting their displeasure :—

“That brewsters and tipplers shall sell no better ale or bere within the dore than without, under the payne of forfeiture.....

The amount of the fine is not given, perhaps the worthy burgesses were unable to decide on the sum, or they may have been conscious that such an offence would not be easy in those days to discover. In the same year their wrath with regard to the unjust treatment, which those who chose to drink at their

own fireside, suffered, brought forth the following definite order :—

“That if any tippler do selle lesse than a quarte of the best ale or bere out of the door for a halfpenny, shall forfeit five shillings.”

Most curious is it to observe, throughout the reign of Mary, how particular he, who made the entries, was that, so far as his own knowledge went, they should be exceedingly correct. Perhaps the scribe with memories of others, who had lost their lives for not acknowledging what had been demanded of them in a previous reign, in the matter of the English Church, resolved that it should not be possible to lay any charge of disrespect at his door, but though he appears to have been so anxious to be courteous, he made so grave an error in describing Mary as “Supreme Head of the Churche of Englande and Irelond,” that it is quite possible, had the fact been known, that his very desire to be correct, might have landed him in some trouble, for although Mary’s father had, without apparently suffering any qualms of conscience, persecuted, and even executed many who were not prepared to acknowledge his Supreme Headship, yet his daughter made no such claim on the Church :—

“1553. Courte holden the xxth daye of October in the first yere of the reyne of or most noble Quene Mary, by the grace of God, of Englande, Ffrance, and Irelonde, Quene defender of the feyght, and also of the Churche of Englande and Irelonde Supreme Head.”

This entry was made within three months of Mary’s accession, probably before the important news, respecting

events which were taking place in religious matters, had penetrated to the little town on the banks of the Windrush. But in the next year a more correct entry was made, the notice with respect to the English Church being omitted :—

“ In the seconde yere of the regne of our sovereign Lorde and Ladye Phillippe and Mary, by the grace of God, King and Queen of Englande, Ffrance, Naples, Jerusalem, and Irelande, defendours of the ffaith, princes of Spain and Cecilie, Archdukes of Austria, Dukes of Millaine, Burgondie and Brabonde, Counties of Haspurge, Filanders, and Tyrolle.”

There can be but little doubt that the official, who made the above entry, copied it from some State document, perhaps one relating to ecclesiastical matters, which may have been sent to Witney, otherwise it is impossible to believe that he would have been acquainted with all the titles which Mary and her Spanish husband appear to have borne. It may be, too, that the fires of Smithfield had much to do with making the official a rifle obsequious. Both these entries come before regulations respecting the brewers ; in one of which it is ordered that they “ shall sell their ale for iiis. viiid. the dozen, that the tipplers shall sell their ale for iiiis. the dozen, good and stale, and that they shall sell their mall drinke for a peny a gawen, good and holesome to man’s body.”

The dozen contained thirteen gallons.

In the first year of the reign of Good Queen Bess, the authorities appear to have proceeded still further in

their efforts to secure a wholesome drink for the people for we have the following :—

“1558 Ordered that every brewer and tippler that breweth ale to sale, shall send, and give sufficient warning to the ale taster, at every time of their brewing, to taste their ale under payne of forfeiting iiis. ivd.”

In these modern days, any brewer who neglected to send for the excise officer, to test, by certain methods the gravity of the beer, would be liable to a fine much exceeding the sum, which was exacted from those wh in days of old neglected to inform the ale taster that hi liquor was ready for his inspection. The excise officer, i may be observed, only takes the place of the ale taster o the 16th century. So far as this is concerned, Histor does but repeat itself, though it may be perceived tha whereas the ale taster came to discover if the ale wer “wholesome to man’s body,” the modern excise-ma comes to test the gravity of the liquor, in order t replenish the Imperial Exchequer. Two widely differer things. It is not at all certain whether in this particula matter we are wiser than our fathers.

From the commencement of the keeping of th records, the tipplers (innkeepers we should call them now appear to have been treated with very great strictnes They were required on all occasions to provide tw sureties, who had to be responsible for good behaviour and they were obliged to sell their ale at prices determine by the officials of Court Leet, though the brewers aga were also obliged to sell to the former at certain charge also settled from year to year by the Assize of ale ; th

latter no doubt being influenced in their decisions by the prices of barley and hops.

An excellent example of the power of Court Leet is afforded in 1566. when it was ordered "that every tippler, within the Borough, which shall after their first warnyng after this p'sent Courte recyve into their houses, or suffer within theire house, or houses, any of the persons whose names are under wyrten and to this order enexed, to the end to tipple or dryncke therein, or to suffer them to sit tippling or drynking, every such tippler to forfeit for every pot of dryncke so dronken by any of the persons undernamed to the use of the lord of the franchise, iiis. iiiid."

After this follows a list of the persons who were under the displeasure of the Court. There are no means of ascertaining of what offences those mentioned had been guilty ; but if they had been guilty of drunkenness or any kindred offence, the punishment was peculiarly fitting. Again, is our modern system of fining a man five shillings and immediately giving him the opportunity of repeating the offence, at all comparable to the more stringent rule of our ancestors ?

"1567. It is decreede that no tippler shall allow any unlawful games in his howse."

Even then, games with cards, such as backgammon, shovelboard, maw, lodam, noddy, gleek, which except backgammon have now grown obsolete, supplied means to those who were so disposed, to indulge in gambling. Three centuries have gone by since the Witney Conscript Fathers made the decree quoted

above, and yet it is found necessary, even now, to make laws dealing with the very same offence.

The following too, is of interest in showing the strict rule of the Court Leet :—

“ 1566. Upon complaint made against Thomas Barnard for lodginge evil dysposed persons without the knowledge and advice of the officers, the said Thomas was discharged by the bayliffe, that he shall not occupye nor typple from hence foorth, from and after the Feast of Pentecost next comyng, upon the Payne to forfeit for doying the contrary the sum of fyve pounds of current money to the use of the said bayliffes and lord of the francys.”

We have no knowledge with regard to the particular offences of the “evil disposed persons,” but it may be pardonable to conjecture that Witney, and all other places in the neighbourhood, were peculiarly subject to the visitation of those who spent the greater part of their time in illegal practices in Wychwood Forest.

There are many other orders with respect to innholders, but those quoted may be regarded as a fair sample.

BREAD.

The laws which affected bakers were, in their way, just as stringent as those which had to do with the brewers, although, while there are regulations respecting the latter from the commencement of the keeping of the book, and probably before, the bakers do not seem to have been interfered with for some time, and it is not till 1559 that the following order was given :—

"It is ordayne that the Bakers shall sell ii loves for a id., and to the Inholder xiiii to the dozen."

But whilst favour was thus shown to the tipplers, it is evident, from the following, that the bakers were in some measure protected :—

"1573. Willm Harris, Inholder at this Courte, was amerced for baking cakes in his howse, iiis. iiiid. ;" and again the same man on the "3rd day of July was fined 5/- for baking on St. Peter's day, 'being aforewarned of the officers.'

This is an illustration, that although the Reformation of the Church of England had taken place some years before, the ancient discipline with respect to Saints' days, and probably other feasts of the Church, was still retained.

"1574. Ordered that if any person or persons, inhabiting within the borouge of Witney, doe at any tyme take any manner of breade or cakes to be solde, other than those which are the comon bakers (or hath been prenticed to Baker's craft) shall forfeit xs."

And while those, whose trade consisted in the making of bread, were thus liberally treated, a watchful eye was also kept on their doings, and many are the records of the paying of the fines, because the article they manufactured lacked weight.

"1550. Item, at this Courte it was appointed and decrede by the said Bailiffs that all inhabitants, dwellinge within this burrouge of Witney, shall mossell all their doggs, and suffere not the said doggs to go in the stretes unmossled after the xxiii daye of Julye next comynge, upon the payne of forfeiture for every such dogge for going unmossled xs."

No doubt, the scourge of hydrophobia, to which we in these later days are no strangers, was responsible for the above order. Now such a decree could only be issued by the authorities at Oxford. How much better was the old system, when people who knew what were their own peculiar needs, were able to legislate for themselves! The offenders in respect to this decree were duly fined, and there are several entries with regard to this, which extend over the records for some years.

Butchers, too, had their share of interference from the local authorities.

"1565. It was ordered in the Courte that upon evry Sonday and other holy day no bocher shall open his shop wyndowes, or doores, to sell any flesh, from the thyrd peale to mornyng & evenyng prayer untyll servis be fully ended, upon payne to forfeit for every default iiis. iiiid."

This would seem to mean that all traffic in the shops of butchers was ordered to be suspended between the third peal of bells ringing for morning prayers, on Sundays, and other holy days, until the service was over, and the same prohibition was applied to Evensong.

Probably the custom was for the ringers to ring three distinct peals, divided by silent intervals before service on "Sundays and other holidays."

"1566. Ordered that no one shall suffer or let their piggs go into the streets unrynged, being above one quarter of a yere old, under payne to forfeit iiis. iiiid."

From the various regulations made respecting pigs being in the streets, it appears certain that the matter

gave the authorities very considerable trouble. Here, then, it is only fair to point out that we, by not allowing swine to appear at random in our streets at all, have made some improvement on the customs of our ancestors. In 1571 certain persons are warned not to allow their pigs to lie under the Tolsey. The latter was a building in which it was usual to pay all the tolls due to the lord of the Manor, hence its name. Witney Tolsey has been demolished for so long a time, that all knowledge with regard to the site it occupied has been lost. In the neighbouring town of Burford, a sixteenth century building still stands, and which is known to this day as the Tolsey.

Later still, in 1578, many people were fined for allowing their pigs to lie in the street, half of which fines were to go into "the Poor Man's box." The latter was a box, which before the passing of the Poor Law Act, stood inside every Church, near the chief entrance, and although there was, of course, no compulsion, it was generally expected that all who had means would subscribe a certain amount for the relief of their poorer brethren. The original "Poor Man's box" may still be seen in many Churches, and usually it appears to have been hewn from the entire trunk of a tree.

The following entries show the kind of litigation which kept the Court Leet employed :—

" 1570. William Peto, woollen draper, demanded at this Courte a certayne debt of Cuthbert Margaris, iiis. iiid., of which the said Cuthbert paid a portion, and promised to pay the remainder."

" 1571. John Swyffee, brode weaver, entered an action of trespass against Richard Ricketts, brode weaver."

The reader will have perceived from many of the entries already taken from the Borough records, how very rigorous was the rule in Witney with regard to matters of every day life ; things in which now every one is permitted to please himself. Perhaps, however, the following extract illustrates the strictness of the rule as forcibly as any :—

" 1607. Memoble., that at this Courte there were presented for their misdeameanor comytted on Sondaie the xxvth of October last, of unlawful howers."

Then follow the names of several delinquents. No punishment is mentioned, though it appears to be certain that the Court had power to deal with offences of this nature. Perhaps the mere fact of the presentment of the names in open Court, where all the chief people of the town were assembled, was a sufficient degradation. What was meant by the offence of keeping "unlawful howers" is by no means clear. It will be observed that the delinquency occurred on Sunday, and it is not at all unlikely that the offence had some connection with being abroad during the time of Divine Service.

The power which the Court Leet possessed is again shown in the following extract :—

" 1577. Ordered by the Bayliffs that noe person shall sell any candles, made of tallow, above the prycce of iiid. of the pounde."

In those days, the tallow chandler's art was not the unimportant one it has become now that we light with

mineral oils, and by gas and electricity. The above entry, though undoubtedly opposed to the principles of political economy, may have been, in the 16th century, justified by some particular action on the part of those who made candles.

No doubt, too, some conflagration, either in the town or in some neighbouring place, accounts for the following order :—

“ 1582. Ordered that every howseholder inhabityng within the Burroughe of Wittneye shall have standing, or sett, without his streeete doore (in every night ffrom the very day of keeping this Courte) untill the daye of the feast of St. Michael, one tubbe, cowle, barrell, payle, panne, or caldron, with water in readiness for necessitie against fyre.”

And, although the above means are not to be compared with our modern remedies for extinguishing fire, yet the precautions adopted were, undoubtedly, of as efficacious a nature as possible.

In days when sanitary arrangements were of the most primitive kind, diseases of various kinds were continually breaking out in different parts of the land, and when these occurred, the inhabitants of places in the neighbourhood where the epidemics were raging, resorted to all means in their power for preventing the scourge from reaching them. Often for weeks together, enormous fires were kept burning between towns infected with disease, and others free from it. Many other expedients were also tried, in order to keep the fell destroyer away. In 1593, Burford and many other towns in the neighbourhood, were visited by an epidemic

somewhat indefinitely described as the Plague, a visitation of so serious a nature, that it became necessary to stop the hunting in Wychwood Forest on Whit Sunday, which privilege, Burford people in common with others in the neighbourhood, possessed.

PRECAUTIONS AGAINST THE PLAGUE.

The original order respecting the stoppage of this hunting, signed by the Lords of the Council, is still in the possession of T. H. Cheatle Esq. of Burford. It is more than likely that the people of Witney were also forbidden to hunt, though of this there is no certain evidence. But in the order relating to Burford, it is stated that if the hunting be carried on “people of divers Townes whereof some are infected will be drawn together to ye hassard of many of he Matys subjects,” and it is only reasonable to suppose that for a similar reason the inhabitants of Witney were precluded from enjoying their annual sport. However this may have been, it is certain from the following order, that all ordinary precautions were taken to prevent the Plague from making its appearance at Witney.

“ 1593. Ordered by the Bayliffs of Witney that any inholder or victuler inhabiting in the towne of Witney, shall not at any tyme or tymes henceforth receive into any of their howses, nor lodge any person or persons coming from any howse or howses of infection as from Burford, Lyneham, Abingdon, or any other infected place whatsoever, to their knowledge upon paine of forfeiture, or else yf any suche persons suspected shall

happen to come to this towne, the victueler to whom the sayde suspected persons shall come shall make the Bayliffs or constables pryye thereunto."

The Court too, was used when exchanges were made, and the following entry is a sample of many of the same nature.

"Exchanged one sorrilled mare with a Baled fasse, foure white fette for one Baye mare, marked on the neare buttocke, and marked with the same on the further shoulder with the crowe's foote."

Whether the above system was successful in making horse-dealing a more moral traffic than it is popularly supposed to be now, is, to say the least, uncertain.

The last entry in the Old Borough Court Book is in 1609, and, although the records were again commenced in 1651, it was not till 1659 that we get a full list of the officers. The Court was then held for the Right Honourable William Lenthal, Esq., speaker of Parliament, but the last clause had a pen drawn through it. Before the next court, the King had been brought back, and old forms were revived as appears in the Latin and French of succeeding records. As the question after this was not so much whether there should be Republican or Monarchical Government, as whether Church or Dissent should be the more powerful, so there are many fines recorded for non-service, possibly on conscientious grounds, on election to office. The remaining entries to 1711, are mostly in Latin, and of no general interest.

The minutes of the presentments seem, from 1705 to 1742, to have been kept in a separate book, and no

doubt the names that appear at the end, are those of the jury. The officers who constituted the Court, were different in some respects, to those who had composed it in the 16th century. There were Bayliffs, Constables, Tythingmen, Clerks of the Market, Leather Sellers, Fish and Flesh Tasters.

The principal work with which the Court engaged itself in the 18th century, was in warning the various people, who lived on either side of the great drain, which ran down the main street, that they would be fined if they did not keep the water course in front of their doors clean ; though in no single instance do fines appear to have been really imposed. There are so many orders with regard to the cutting down of the trees that there can be scarcely any doubt the latter were willows, and that they were more numerous than they are now.

Butchers' Shambles were erected at this time, and many are the notices respecting them. The penalties incurred, however, seem to have been nugatory, and seldom or never enforced, and notices of nuisances became an institution.

It is worthy of note that what is now called Corn Street, was then, and probably before, known as Corndele Street.

Gradually all signs of healthy, local Government faded away, and the Court Moot seems to have been engaged in attending to dunghills, and making presentments of which nobody took notice. For example, a Mr. Edward Witts built a house on land, which belonged to the Court Leet, so the following presentment appears in the Court Book for some years :

"It is presented that Mr. Edward Witt's house standeth upon our town House Wall."

But the gentleman concerned seems to have taken no notice of the presentment at all, and even to have made a "pot-ash-pitt" inside the boundaries of the borough, contrary to the wishes of the officers of the Court Leet. This, however, had only the effect of wasting more paper in making presentments, and from the number of times these appear, it would seem that Mr. Witt treated the Court with the utmost disdain.

The notices end in 1748. There is an entry on the book, which shows that a quarrel sprang up between the Bailiffs and Lord Cornbury, the Lord of the Manor, the former contending that the Borough Court belonged to them, and not to the latter. A trial at law appeared inevitable, but at the last moment, the officers of the Court succumbed, as was their usual custom.





CHAPTER VI.

Ecclesiastical Witney.

THE earliest history of England has been said to be its Church History, and this statement is undoubtedly correct. But the most ancient records of the Diocese of Lincoln, in which Witney was situated, go no further back than the 12th century, and, if an idea be required of Ecclesiastical affairs in Witney before this period, it will probably have to be drawn from the imagination. No doubt, at the time when the Britons inhabited the valley of the Windrush, there were those who had heard the words which tell of Life Eternal, either from missionaries who were sent by St. Paul, and others to this island, or else from some Roman soldiers who had been taught the Truth in other lands. The Roman Army was one means by which the world gained a knowledge of the Saviour of men, and in its ranks there would surely be those who, through lonely night watches, thought of Him who had suffered on Calvary, and such faithful men would spread the knowledge they had to the poor and oppressed people,

amongst whom they sojourned. Be this as it may, there is conclusive evidence to be found, when we come to the fourth century, that the earliest British Churches had diocesan Bishops such as we have at the present day. For we find them amongst the signatories of the Council of Arles in A.D. 314. And we may fairly gather the continuity of the Church in these islands from that time to this. In many respects, no doubt, it differed very much from the Church which exists now. Old superstitions were hard to destroy, and in all probability, there were many reactions in favour of that religion called Druidism, which had exercised such evil influence in earlier times, but, however broken and imperfect the first efforts of faith may have been, it was the germ of that pure Catholic teaching, which has come down to us through so many centuries, and which after being subject to every conceivable attack from its enemies, yet remains unshaken and undestroyed. Very interesting would it be to record the part which Witney took at such a period, for part it is only reasonable to suppose it did take, as was the case elsewhere. But if such record can ever be made, it will be by the pen of some other writer.

Neither have we any knowledge with respect to what took place here, when the country was over-run with the fair-haired marauders, who came from Germany, bringing with them, and establishing that heathenism, which was so largely successful in destroying what little there was of Christianity. But a time came before very long, when the Saxons themselves

became naturalized in England, and gradually converted to Christianity, and then Witney might probably be one of the first places which reaped an advantage from the new state of affairs. For, if, as has been supposed, this place from early times was the abode of those who were engaged in the manufacture cloth, its name would be well known, and missionaries would be anxious to reach the spot, which may then have become of considerable renown. But a period is at length reached, when conjecture gives place to fact. It has already been mentioned that Witney was, according to tradition, one of the Manors given to the See of Winchester in connection with the deliverance of Queen Emma from the fiery ordeal of the Plough shares.

GIFT OF WITNEY LANDS TO ÆLFWINE, BISHOP OF
WINCHESTER, BY EDWARD THE CONFESSOR, KING OF
ENGLAND, A.D. 1044.

“The goodness of the Almighty Christ (our) God, “abundantly flowing, calls for all praise. And it is “to be praised before everything else, for it cannot be “restricted within any limitations of goodness, since “the same God, Himself, is the essence of His own “goodness, dispensing a share of His goodness, not “only to the worthy, but also to the unworthy. But “He is, moreover, King of Kings, and Creator of all “things which exist visible and invisible alike, and the “wisest disposer of His Creation, disposing all things “freely, as is the prerogative of His Divine rule. For “He places some persons in a superior position to

"others, as regards this world's dignity, and divers
"kinds of wealth. To whom again He gives mandate
"that they may, themselves, by their own sufficiency,
"relieve the wants of those who have less abundance
"of secular things, and for this, that they may be
"able to be gifted by Him with a greater reward.
"Werefore I Eadwardus, King of the English nation,
"incited by His council to obtain the reward of such
"remuneration, do give to a certain Bishop, my friend
"Ælfwine, and in regard to his loyal allegiance,
"wherewith he faithfully seconds my efforts, to wit ; xxx
"'mansas' (hides ?) in the place which the people,
"who live there, called Witanige, that during his life
"he may possess the freehold, and that at his death
"he may bequeath them to whomsoever he shall have
"selected as satisfactory to himself. Let that small
"portion of country territory be free from all liability
"of worldly service, save that service which is required
"of all in common—namely, castle-repair, and bridge-
"restoration, and the furnishing of soldiers to serve
"against the Country's foes.

"If any person in any manner whatsoever, shall
"have willed by the endeavour of a wicked mind, to
"infringe this donative gift of mine, and snatch it
"violently away, being shut out from the Communion
"of God (who commands us to relieve the necessities
"of our inferiors, according to His love) let that man
"be bound, and fettered with the thongs knotted
"inextricably of eternal damnation, unless he repent
"and the pardon upon his penitence, wipe out (his
"guilt)"

In the year of the Lord's Incarnation, one thousand and forty-four. "Indictione duodecimâ et septem concurrentibus atque xviii epactis votantibus: hæc regalis conceptio atque donatio facta est, sub astipulatione primatum quarum nomina hic caraxata sunt."

Here follow the names of the signatories, commencing with the King and his mother, *Ælgyfu* (Emma).

"Ego Eadwardus Rex totius Britannie prefatum meam donationem cum sigillo sce (i.e. sanctæ) crucis regali stabilimento affirmavi.

[I, Edward, King of all Britain, have affirmed, with my Royal ratification, this, my donation, already described, with the seal of the Holy Cross.]

Ego, *Ælgyfu*, ejusdem regis mater, hanc regalem, donationem cum sigillo sanctæ crucis regali stabili mento affirmair.

[I, *Ælgyfu* (Emma) mother of the same King, have affirmed, with my Royal ratification, this Royal gift, with the seal of the Holy Cross.]

Then follow the signatures of:—

Eadsinus, Archbishop.

Ælfyricus, Archpræsul.

Ælfwinus, Bishop of Winchester.

Beophtperoldus, Bishop of Wilton

Eadnodus, Bishop of Dorchester.

And seven other Bishops; and then ten Dukes, and ten of lower rank (*Ministri*).

About a century after, when the Hospital of Holy Cross was founded, or at any rate, built by

Henry of Blois, Bishop of Winchester, it was enriched with various Churches, and the Church of Witney was one of these. The original endowment of the House of Holy Cross, called also the House of St. John of Jerusalem, is as follows :—

“Also it is by license of Robert, Bishop of Lincoln, in the said year of the Lord, 1162, by which he conceded and confirmed to Walter, prior of the Hospital, the house of Jerusalem in England, the Church Wyteneye to the Hospital of Wynton.” (Lincoln Registers).

THE ENDOWMENT (BY ROBERT, BISHOP OF LINCOLN) OF THE HOSPITAL OF HOLY CROSS, WINCHESTER, WITH LANDS AT WITNEY AND OTHER PLACES. A.D. C. 1162. (V. HARL. BIB. COD. 1616 REGISTR. SCI. CONCIS, WINTON.
(LANGFORD.)

I, by favour of Divine Grace, have ordained what duties ought by you to be unceasingly and faithfully fulfilled, saving always the canonical jurisdiction of the Bishop of Winchester, so that the constitution and administration of the Prior of the same Hospital may be made by the hands of the Bishop ; and that duly rendered, with all things appertaining to it, handed over from me to the administrators of the same Hospital, quietly, it may remain, and unshakenly among those undoubtedly pertaining ; these properties we have caused to be noted by their names.

The Church of Ferreham

” ”	Pattesellyng
” ”	Mellebroc
” ”	Twyford

The Church of Henton

” ”	Alwinastok
” ”	Eaton
” ”	Hupebone
” ”	Wythenhe
” ”	Chythalton
” ”	Wordeheya
” ”	Awelton
” ”	Wyteneya (i.e. Witney)
” ”	Scotton
” ”	Wynton

“ With all things pertaining, and the perquisites of them, and the titles of the Lordship of Waltham and other rents assigned in the city of Winton.”

After this time we know nothing whatever respecting Ecclesiastical matters at Witney, for a period of more than a hundred years. But in 1291, Pope Nicholas ordered a taxation of England and Wales, and the Church of Witney was at that time declared to be (according to the money of those days) of the value of £40 os. 8d., while the Vicarage was said to be worth £4 6s. 8d. This meagre information is all that can be gleaned of Church affairs in Witney for a long time. Of the part that was played by any of the residents in this Oxfordshire town, during the time when John Wycliffe was endeavouring by the aid of his “poor priests” to paralyse the power of the Pope in England we know not, but it is almost safe to conjecture that here came those who were eager to preach the new doctrines, which those who were called in contempt Lollards, (i.e. Babblers) were then disseminating.

was to manufacturing centres that these emissaries of Wycliffe loved to go. Here they were able to point out to the down-trodden artisans, how shamefully they were treated owing to the conditions under which they lived. Those who heard the Gospel from these true sympathizers with a persecuted race, did not separate from the Church, but continued in its communion, and it is worthy of note that one of the first great efforts against the power of the Pope, and in favour of liberty, especially for the poor and oppressed, originated with those who were priests and scholars of the English Church, and who lived and died professing the particular doctrines which she held. The seed which had been planted by these earnest men, apparently bore little fruit for a long time. The world still went on. Civil War devastated the land. More than one dynasty was upset, great and remarkable discoveries, both scientific and geographical, were made, and during all this time there existed in England a certain number who never forgot the courageous Wycliffe, nor the scriptural doctrine which he taught.

Not that they were able to declare their admiration of him publicly. No! Liberty in both Religious and Civil Matters had yet to be gained after many a hard fought battle with the Sovereign, and all the authority that pertains to Sovereignty on one side, and on the other side men with few advantages of rank, or power, but conscious of the great cause they had in hand, conscious too, of the deep claims of freedom, and strongly imbued with the necessity for resisting the encroachments of those who were espousing the cause of

oppression and wrong. Fearfully, and with trembling, did these people assemble, keeping the Word which speaks of comfort hidden, as did Thomas Bilney and others, beneath the flooring of their rooms. It was at just such places as Witney, where those of the artisan classes lived, who were most intelligent, that the remembrance of Wycliffe's pure doctrines remained. But as time went on, and as the number of those who were at variance with the usual practices, customary in the Church, (then very much under the dominion of Rome) increased, they became bolder, and were in the habit, frequently, of congregating together, to hold communion one with another. These people were in no sense antagonistic to the Church of England, they may be rather regarded as pioneers in the struggle, which soon commenced for freeing our Branch of Catholic Christendom from the intolerable yoke of the Church and Court of Rome. Officers, ecclesiastical and otherwise, were continually on the watch to arrest any who assembled in conventicles, or who were guilty in any way of doing anything which might be construed into a breach of the law.

John Foxe has preserved in his Ecclesiastical History the names of those who underwent grievous affliction in 1521, which names he copied from the Registers of the Diocese of Lincoln.

“ACCUSER.	PARTIES ACCUSED.	CRIMES OBJECTED.
Robert Pope.	William Gune and his wife, tanner, John Baker, of Witney, weaver.	For reading a certain treatise upon the Paternoster.”

ACCUSER.	PARTIES ACCUSED.	CRIMES OBJECTED.
"Robert Colyns	John Baker, weaver of Witney.	For having the book of the Apocalypse. For reading the Epistle of St. Peter in English in the home of Robert Colyns, in Asthal."
"Robert Colyns Alice, wyfe of Gune (No Offence stated). of Wytney.	Thomas Baker, father to Gune's wife, of Witney".	
"Roger Dods	William Gunne, of Witney, and others.	That they, being in the house of John Harris, of Upton, at the marriage of Joan, the wife of Robert Burges, did read in a book, called " Nicodemus Gospele,' that made the cloth in which our Lord was buried in (as the Register saith) and in that book is the story of the destruction of Jerusalem."

ACCUSER.	PARTIES ACCUSED.	CRIMES OBJECTED.
"Roger Dods	John Baker, weaver of Wytney, the Bayliffe of Wytney. John Brabant, John Brabant, his son, with his wife.	For reading in a certain English book of Scripture, they being together in John Brabant's house, of Stanlake."
"Roger Dods	John Brabant, the younger son, with his wife. Reginald Brabant, of Standlake.	For reading in a certain English book of Scripture, they being together in John Brabant's house in Standlake."
"John Brabant, John Brabant, his elder son of father & mother. John Brabant, Philip Brabant, his did nominate. uncle.	For being present when the Scriptures were read in Hakker's house ; the words of Philip Brabant were these — " that it was deadly sin to go on Pilgrimage."	

As I have stated in another part of this book, the occurrence of the name of Brabant is almost conclusive evidence that the Flemings settled here in order to teach the manufacturers how to produce better cloth. They brought with them from their own land a religion,

which, in a great measure, agreed with that which those who wished for a reformation in Ecclesiastical matters in England, professed. These people had generally been allowed to worship in the way they chose, on account of the benefits which their advent conferred on the country, and, although in this instance, they seem to have been treated as harshly as were the English, yet in many parts of the kingdom, even in the reign of Mary, they appear to have, in some measure, escaped the persecution which pressed so heavily on those who professed the new doctrines in many places throughout the land.

The secrecy with which these persecuted people met is worthy of notice. They were, of course, afraid to assemble where the officers of the King commonly resided, so in such little places as Asthall and Upton they met, the former a moderately sized village, the latter a mere hamlet, consisting at the most of a dozen houses. Both places are said in former days to have been engaged in the woollen manufacture, and, this would in some measure furnish an excuse for these weavers assembling in such places. As may be seen from perusing the names of the witnesses, and those of the accused, sometimes members of the same family appeared against their own kindred. This need excite no surprise ; a very different state of things existed to that which we experience in these happier days. The officials then, no doubt, succeeded by torture in extracting from some of those who had been present when the offence was committed an account of what took place, and then forced them to come forward as witnesses. This seems to be the only explanation of

what appears, at first sight, unnatural, and therefore improbable.

The "Crimes" which these persons committed seem ridiculous enough to us now. "Reading a treatise upon the Paternoster," "having a book of the Apocalypse," and "expressing an opinion with regard to going on a Pilgrimage," would be considered, in our days of freedom, no offences at all. We must, however, remember that the times were altogether different. And with respect to the crime of being in possession of different books of Scripture, it is but fair to say that the authorities were actuated by the purest motives in endeavouring to restrain the publication of books, some of which were not genuine portions of the Canonical Bible. And in order to understand the particular offence which Philip Brabant committed when he stated that to go on a Pilgrimage was a deadly sin, it is necessary to remember that the act of going on a pilgrimage was then regarded, rightly or wrongly, as one of a deeply pious nature. People, from the highest to the lowest class, esteemed it to be their especial duty, at various times, to go on a Pilgrimage to the shrine of some Saint, as that of S. Thomas of Canterbury, or else to the Holy Land to inspect the places which have played the greatest part in the History of the World. So, having regard to the particular veneration in which the going on a Pilgrimage was held, the words which Philip Brabant used must certainly be regarded as having been, in a great measure, indiscreet. We must, at the same time, give him credit for his fearlessness in attacking what he felt to be wrong.

and tainted with more than the usual superstition of the age. In any case we should now rightly consider such a matter as exceedingly trivial.

Besides the names recorded in this book of those who were fighting the battle of religious freedom in the 16th century, are those mentioned who resided in Burford, where their conventicles seem to have been generally held, but as Burford is in the Deanery of Witney, the names appear together with those already referred to. The punishment meted out to these people varied in different cases. Some were sent to the neighbouring monasteries :— “Osney, Frideswide, Abingdon, Tame, Bicester, Dorchester, Ensham, there to be kept and founde of Almes all their life, and to be kept in perpetual penance.” A letter is still preserved which the Bishop of Lincoln of those days, wrote to the Abbott of Eynsham, concerning a certain R.T., saying that his meat and drink may be given him as alms, “if he so order himself by his labour within your house, and in your business, whereby he may deserve his meat and drink, so you may order him as seems convenient to his deserts, so that he pass not the borders of your monastery.”

The penance enjoined, under pain of relapse, by John Langland, Bishop of Lincoln, on the persons mentioned before, was as follows :—

“ Every one to go upon a Market day, thrice, about the Market of Burford, and then to stand upon the highest steps of the Cross there a quarter of an hour, with a faggot of wood upon his shoulder.”

"Every one also to bear a faggot of wood before the procession on a certain Sunday, at Burford, from the Quire doore going out to the Quire doore going in, all the High Mass time kneeling with the same before the High Altar, and to do the same at a general procession at Uxbridge, and one to beare a faggot at the burning of a heretic."

"Also every one to fast—bread and ale only, every Friday—and on Corpus Christi on bread and water only, during their lives. Also to say every Sunday Our 'Lady Psalter' once through."

"Also none of them to hide their mark upon their cheek, neither with cap, hat, hood, &c., nor suffer their beard to grow past 14 days, nor ever to haunt together except in open Market, Fair, Church, Inn, or Alehouse, where others may see their conversation."

The Mark above mentioned was a + branded with a hot iron, and the remark made about not hiding it with cap, &c., throws a strong light on the practices which prevailed in the matter during that age of religious intolerance. This penance was enjoined, "under paine of relapse," which expression put into plain English meant that, in case of neglect or refusal, the offending persons would be given up to the Civil Authorities to be burnt.

The Witney people were ordered to assemble at Burford, to undergo their penance, because there were many more in the latter town, who had been sentenced to punishment for a like offence.

The town of Uxbridge, where the "penitents" were condemned to assemble in a general procession, probably

of those who came from many counties, is at least 50 miles away, and when the danger and difficulty of travelling at that period, is taken into account, it will be perceived that the punishment ordered was not light. In more than one matter, as the author has pointed out in these pages, we appear to have absolutely deteriorated from the ways of our ancestors. But he would be a bold man who would assert, that the present freedom of choice in religious matters, compares at all unfavourably with what prevailed in the 16th century.

BEQUESTS TO THE CHURCH.

The bequests of some Witney people to the Church are not without interest. The following are the most important :—

"1544. September 26th. John Croft, of Witney, gives to the High Altar, within the Church of Witney xiid., also for the reparation of the said Church xiid., item to the bells there xiid., item to the rood light iiiid., item to the torch light iiiid., item I give towards the mendinge of the High ways about Witney xx loads of stone, and carried with my own cart.

Witness Thomas Knight, Clark, Vicar of Witney."

The "High Altar," "the bells," "the rood light," the "torch light," and "Highways," were objects commended to persons for charity in the Middle Ages. The Rood light was undoubtedly some kind of illumination, which could be fixed on the Rood loft, so that at the evening, or early morning services, it would be possible for the congregation to see the great crucifix, erected, usually, on the loft or wooden gallery, which thence took its name.

The Torch Light mentioned, had, probably, to do with the general lighting of the Church. The Highways at the time of the above bequests, must have been in a lamentable condition, for there was no public money expended on them, and they were consequently entirely dependent upon private benefactions.

"1544. January 16th. Edmund Richards, of Witney, gives to the High Altar iiis. iiiid. to be distributed at my buriall, and month's mind xxs.

Witness Thomas Knight, Clark, Vicar of Witney."

"Month's mind" was a month from the date of burial.

"1535. May 21st. William Freeman bequeathes his body to be buried in the Church yard of St. Mary, of Witney, to the High Altar viiid., item to the Resurrection Altar in the said Church, one Altar Cloth, also I bequeath to the great bell xiid.

Witness Elys Warsen, Vicar of Witney."

"1542. William Howes, of Witney, bequeathes his body to be buried within the parish Church of Witney. To the High Altar xxd., item to the great bell within the same Parish Church iiis. iiiid.

Witness Thomas Knight, Vicar of Witney."

"1545. May 18th. John Smith, of Hailey, in the Parish of Witney, bequeathes to the High Altar xiid. To the rode light iiiid. To the torch light iiiid. Witness Thomas Knight, Clark."

"1545. May 2nd. John Clemson, of Witney bequeathes to the High Altar xiid., to the rood ligh: iiiid. To the torch light iiiid."

"1545. August 8th. Andrew Taylor, of Witney bequeathes to the High Altar viiid."

"1545. Henry Hicks, of Hailey, in the Parish of Witney, bequeaths to the High Altar, within the Church of Witney xiid."

"1545. March 3rd. John More, of Witney, bequeaths to the High Altar iiiid."

"1545. William Fuller, of Witney, bequeaths to the High Altar viiid. ; to the bells xxid ; to the rode light iiiid."

"1545. William Ablige, of Witneye, leaves to the High Altar iiiid."

There prevails amongst some people a belief that when the final severance of the Church of England from the Church of Rome took place, the greatest difference was at once manifested in rites and ceremonies, and that immediately there began a change, which rapidly ended in the services being conducted in much the same manner as is seen in most Churches now. The bequests which are quoted before this, show conclusively, that so far as Witney was concerned, at least, this could not have been the case. Not one of these bequests was made till after 1534, the date when Henry VIII, weary of the delays which the Pope caused, in the matter of his divorce from Catherine of Arragon, threw off the chains which bound, in some measure, the Church of England to the Church of Rome; most of the bequests, indeed, were made more than 10 years later, and yet there is the same desire manifested, that the rood should be maintained in all its splendour, that the High Altar should still stand clothed with all its ornaments, and that the various

Altars which stood in different parts, should yet remain. The truth is that, so far as ritual was concerned, for the first 12 years, at least, there was no change whatsoever in the Church of England, and there was no reason why there should be, for whatever a minority of the people may have thought, the majority were yet ardent lovers of ornate ritual. True, there had been a change in the Liturgy, as regards certain portions of it being said in English, but the innovations were by no means important. It was not till the next reign that doctrines were taught, and practices commenced, which were more in accord with the present teaching and ritual of the English Church.

In the reign of Edward VI, the Commissioners appointed to enquire into the condition of the Churches and Towns, made the following Report:—

‘The psshe The Chapel Certain lands Sir William of Wytnay or Chauntre & tenements Dalton where are of or Ladye given to Incumbent houselyng certeyn of xl yeres feoffees to a man of fynd a good behaviour priest to sing and pray for all crystenn learned and souls in the said Church had for his salary the cleare for ever. revenue of the said

“lands and tenements, and hath n:o other lyvyne but only the same.”

The value of all the lands and tenements, belonging to the same ys yerely Repryses yerely and to remain clere.	li. s. viii. xvi. s. d. xxxii v li. s. d. vii. vii vi	Plate weyng by estima- tion in the keeping of the incum- ber, viii ounces, ornaments, valued at s. d. xiii viii.”
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“ Mem : That yt is presented unto us, the King's Maties commission, that the said William Dalton, chauntry priest, doth hold a close and ground to his, and to his successors by copie of Court, after the custom of the Manor of Witney, and the chauntry priest (as we were informed) at every charge doth paye for his fyne to the lorde of the said Manor of Witney the double of the lord's rent and the custom ys and the tenant ys purchase his shal pay (sic) three yeres rent for his fyne, also that William Farmer, William Box and others were suffeofed of the said lands and tents to the use of the priest to be founded for ever.”

"Obitis there Founded by Law- Incum- Value of all
 for term of rence Farmour, bent belonging
 xl yeres which gave cer- none to the said
 teyn lands and ys yerely
 tents to the xiii. iii.
 founding of ornaments,
 divers obitts plate,jewels
 within the said to the same
 Parishe Church none."
 for term of xi
 yeres.

"The Chaun- Certeyn lands and Incum- Value of
 tre called tents ffor to bent lands to
 Ffarmour's fynde and kepe none tents be-
 chamebre an obitt there longing to
 for the term of the same
 lxxx yeres of the vili. viiis.
 gift of Thomas iiiid. orna-
 Ffarmour ments to
 be none."

"Houselyng" in the above report signifies communicants. The Commissioners stated with respect to Burford that there were in that Parish 144 "houselyng" people, 800 is the number which they state to be communicants at Witney, a fact which implies, either that the latter was a place five times the size of Burford, or that the inhabitants of it were more religiously inclined than were those of its western neighbour.

The aisle in the South transept, in which the Altar tomb of the Wenmans now stands, may be the part of the Church which was used as Fermour's Chantry; the remnant of a richly canopied niche, which may be seen at the North end of that aisle, had possibly some connection with this Chantry.

Chapels of Our Lady were used for the daily celebration of the Holy Communion. Chantries were of later date than the above; the Holy Communion was celebrated in them for the departed souls of those who built them, and of their relations. The Incumbents appointed to them had no connection with the Churches in which their Chantries were situated, and they were presented to their office by either the founder of the endowment, or by his heirs. These Chantry Priests were abolished, by Act of Parliament, in the reign of Edward VI, and, although their revenues were confiscated by the crown, the buildings themselves were kept by the representatives of the founders, and in many instances used as Mortuary Chapels. In some cases, later on, pews were put in these Chapels, which possibly accounts for the expression "Family Pew." In other instances, as at Witney, these Chantries were incorporated with the building, the screens which separated them from the rest of the Church being, in many cases, removed.

In 1526, a new missal was presented to the Church at Witney by Ann Wenman, who was one of the Wenmans of Caswell House. In confirmation of this, there is an entry on the last leaf of a Sarum

missal, in the Bodleian Library, as follows:—"Be it rememberyed that Sir John Richarde bought this missale in Oxforde the fyrst daye of May, yn the yere of oure Lorde God a thowsande ffyve hunderde and syxe and twentye, and yn the xviiith yere of the reigne of Kyng Henry the viith, to the honour of God, and for the aulter of Saynt Mary Maudelin, yn the paryshe Chyrche of Wittney, of the gift of Anne Wenman." The missal, above mentioned, was at one time in the possession of Bishop White Kennett.

THE CHURCHWARDENS' BOOK OF ACCOUNTS

begins thirty years too late to give us any information respecting the part which Witney took when the Reformation was proceeding. Things, even for some time previous to 1569,—the year the Churchwardens made their first entry — were in an exceedingly unsettled state, and it is more than likely that the commencing of this book marks the beginning of a new and better state of things.

The first entry is as follows:—

"The boke of the Church.

Account of the parisse of Witney Begonne. the Third Day of Aprill in Anno Dni, 1569.

Be it alwaies remenbered

that it hath bene the custome of the parishe (tyme out of memory used) that for everye persone which shall be buried within the Churche (of Witney aforesayde) shall be levied by the Churche Wardens (then for the tyme being) to and for the use and mayntenance of the sayd Churche

Sixe shillings and Eight pence."

"And also for everye persone which shall have the greate bell ryng for theire forthe vale Passing bell or at theire buriall vii."

"A note of certayne
parcells of the towne goodes comenly remayning in
the handes of the Churche Wardens:—

- Item twoo brasse potts.
- Item twoo greate broches.
- Item one payre of Iron racks.
- Item xxi pewter platters.
- Item viii Tynne Spoones.
- Item three table clothers.
- Item vi new napkyns.
- Item viii olde napkyns.
- Item one brason bason with Co.
- Item Tenne trenchers."

"1569.

The accounts of Thomas Hanks and Richard Wyat,
Churche Wardens, taken the thirde day of Aprill, in the
yeare above written, by Phyllippe Boxe and Pete
Ramsell, then Baylyfes, Thomas Tate, Thomas Taylor,
Henry Jones, Thomas Bysshope, William Ellmore,
Gyles Jones, and Thomas Clemson, dyers, others of
the Parishioners. At which tyme there remayned
in the Churche stocke, clere, all thyngs discharged,
four pounds and fyve shillings, I saye. £⁴ vs."

"And more in debts owing to the Charges due
to be receaved as follows, this particukarlye."

"Item of Sir Richard Wenman Knight, for the
buryall of twoo children, within the Churche, in one
grave. vis. viiid."

"Item, more of hym for ringing the greate bell for the same children." viid."

"Item, of Thomas King for the greate bell ringing for his wyfe." viid."

"At which account Peter Ramsell and Richarde Saverge were elected and appoynted (by the whole Company, above nominated) to be Churche Wardens for the year next following; unto whom was delivered the some of £*iv*. sv. above expressed in current money. And also a note of the somes next above wrytten, then due, to be received. And so fynishes this Accompte."

It will be observed that the inventory given is not one relating to Church processions, but of "towne goodes," and it is probable that the "brasse potts," "the pewter platters," "the trenchers," &c., were chattels kept by the Churchwardens, but which were used after the annual hunt in Wychwood Forest for cooking the venison which had been obtained, or, as appears from a subsequent entry, they may have been required for use at the "Baylyffe's Annual Feast." Churchwardens were generally appointed, in those early times, to superintend affairs connected with Feasts, &c. The office of Churchwarden is thought to be now no sinecure at Witney. How much more onerous was it when the cooking of venison, and the apportioning of it amongst the people, was one of the duties connected with it. Curiously, no inventory of Church goods appears in the Register till two years after, but in 1571 there is the following:—

“Anno Dni. 1571.

The accompte of Thomas Bisshoppe and Gyles Jones (Churche-wardens, of Witney) made the xxii day of Aprill (being then Lowe Sunday) in the yeare above wrytten. These being present—Leonarde Yate, the elder, and William King, then Bayliffes of the Borrough of Wittney, aforesayde, Thomas Yate, Henry Jones, Phyllppe Boxe, Stephen Boyce Wycks, William Ellmore, Richarde Hyatt, Thomas Clemson, Henry Smythe, Richarde Homfrey, and Richard Bryce (this wryter,) with dyvers others of the towne and parrisse of Wittney, aforesaide. At which tyme there remayned of the Churche Stocke, cleere all thynges discharged, the some of foure poundes and eight shillings of currant Eng. money.”

“At this accompte were elected and appointed by the generall consent of the persones, above nominated, the Churchwardens of the Churche of Wittney, Phyllype Boxe and Richarde Homfrey, unto whom was delivered them in readye money of the Churche stocke, the some of £viii viis.”

“And also a newe Communion Cuppe, of silver, double guylted, containing in wayght (£v. sxvi. dvi.) sixteen ounces and a half @ seven shillings the ounce.”

“Item, a streamer of bleue sylke with a goldden lyon and other braunches of gold in the same.”

“Item, a newe gable rope (made for the bells) which wayets five todds and five pounds, and did cost xxxvs., and more delivered to the same Churche Wardens all the other parcells of ymplements which

are expressed at the nether end of the first leafe of this present boke."

It is highly probable that "the streamer of blue sylke" was a banner used in connection with one of the guilds, which formerly existed in this town.

ANNO DMI 1573.

"The accounte of Phillippe Boxe and Richard Humfrey, Churchwardens of Wittney, made the vii daye of Apryll, being the thirde Sundaye after Easter Daye, in the yeare above wrytten. These being present—Mr. Scott, (then viker of Wittney, aforesayed), Thos. Yate, Hen. Jones, Stephen Bryce, William Wicks, William Ellmore, Henry Smyth, Roberte Bowman, Trewe Penye, Robert Harris and Richarde Bryce, (the wryter hearof), with dyvers others of the Towne of Wittney, aforesayde. At which tyme the Churche remained indebte to the sayde Churche Wardens (by reason of a newe castyng of the greate bell and thirde bell) and of other greate charges done aboute the same bells and the beste of the bells, and payng for glasing of the schoole house wyndowes, the which was done twoo yeares before, the some of £iv xiis. ivd.

"At this accompte were elected and appoynted (by the general consent of the persons, above nominated) to be Churche Wardens of the Churche of Wittney, aforesayde, for the yeare next following, Phyllip Boxe, Leonarde and Nicholas Gunne, of Wittney, and with them John Trewepeny, of Crodrydge, and Robert Bowmun, of Hayley."

"In whose hands was lefte the Newe Communion Cuppe, mentioned in the leafe of the laste accompte before this."

"And also all other ymplements, expressed in the same leafe."

The latter part of the 16th, and the early part of the 17th century, was a period when the bells of Churches appear to have received special attention. Later particulars respecting the bells, may be found in the description of the Church.

What is here called the School House, may have been the Chantry, which stood at the Eastern end of the South Transept, or it may have been a "Free School," which existed even at this period in the town, and to which reference is made later on. All knowledge with regard to the endowment (if any) of it, has been lost.

During the years 1575, 1577, and 1578, nothing of importance is recorded, except that "Surveyors of the Ways" were appointed for the first time at the Annual Vestry Meeting. It was at this period of Good Queen Elizabeth's reign, that the terrible condition of the highways began to excite attention, and with the object of improving them, persons, to superintend their repair, were ordered to be chosen at the yearly meeting of the Church officials.

The inventory of Church goods for 1580, is as follows :—

"The Communion Cuppe before in this booke expressed."

"A Carpet and Lynnen Clothe for the Communion Table."

"Two Surplices, twoo lynnен table Clothes, for the Guylde Hall."

"Sixe table Napkins, one payre of Iron Racks, twoo iron broches, one brasse pott, one brasen eower, and a bleue Sylke Streamer, with a golden lyon in the same."

The Guild Hall mentioned, disappeared so long ago that all authentic knowledge with respect to the site it occupied has been lost. It is very curious that in the preceding inventories there is no notice of Church vestments, except of the surplice. The six table napkins, mentioned, were most likely used in connection with the administration of the Holy Communion. Even now, at the Parish Church at Leamington, clean white napkins are placed along the Altar rails every Sunday in the year, when the Holy Communion is celebrated, (Church Folk-lore p. 70); and the ancient "houselling cloth" is still spread on the rails at S. Mary's, Oxford.

"Anno Dni 1582.

Richarde Humphrey and Richarde Johnson (Churchwardens) in the sight and presence of Mr. Richarde Smyth, Clearcke, then Viker of Witney."

"Md. That at the sayde accompte there was remayning of ready money in the poore men's Boxe the which was geeven at Communions within the sayde yeare £v. iiis."

"Item at this accompte, the blewe streamer (the which is mentioned in the nether ende of the last

accompte) was solld unto Peter Rankell, by the
generall consent of all the persones above nominated,
for the which was presentlye payde unto John
Saunders vis. viiid."

"Anno Dni. 1582.

Accompte yielded upon Lowe Sunday in the presence of Mr. Richarde Smyth, Clarke then Vicar of Witney."

The Churchwardens had gathered and receaved into theire handes to and for the mayntenance of Wittney Churche £iii. xv.s. viii.d., besydes Phillippe Boxe, his yerely gyfte towards the mayntenance of the sayde Churche vi.s. viii.d. the which was allowed unto hym at this accompte, towards the charge which he had layde oute for casting the great bell when he was Churche Warden of Wittney."

"Whereof layde out in Charities by the sayde
Churche Wardens in the year £iii. viii.s. vii.d."

"Whereof payde to William Hanks, the 6th of May, 1582, for the serplus of wyne, spent at communions in the last years, and in this yeare which he had layde oute over and above all the money which he had received for that purpose xvi.s. x.d."

"Payde more to hym for candles, spent at mornyng
prayer viii.d. And more for engrosing of the
christening booke iiis.. vi.d."

"Payde more to John Lynley at this account for
money which hee had layde out for Communion wine,
twoo yeares past, and to cleare hym for the Churche

xvii

"At this account the Churche was cleared from
Phippe Boxe, for castynge the Bell, at which tyme
they payde hym vi.s."

"Also there remayned in the poore mens boxe in
readye money £ii 4s."

"Item at this account there was owing to the
great bell, foorth vales."

A poor man's box was ordered to be placed in every Church ; it was commonly made by hollowing out the trunk of a tree, while precaution from misappropriations were provided against by fastening it with three locks. It must be remembered that the poor, who were so unfortunate as to be unable, from various causes, to earn a living, were in the most miserable condition at this time that it is possible to conceive. The monasteries must have served, with all their evils, several useful purposes, one of the most important of which was, that their inmates had taken care of those who were unable to help themselves. These religious houses had, at the times spoken of, disappeared, and till the enactment of the first Poor Law in 1601, there was much need to be continually replenishing the Poor man's box, which was placed in every Parish Church.

How shall we interpret the "blue streamer?" If indeed it had been used in connection with some Guild Festival, its use would have been obsolete, and, in all probability it had been for some time an encumbrance to the Churchwardens. The Guilds had all disappeared, for Puritan influences were beginning to make themselves felt. It is

pardonable, however, to wonder to what particular trade Peter Rankell belonged, as it would then be possible to judge, in some measure, to what use he intended to put it. Was he a draper? If so, did he meditate selling it piece by piece to his poorer customers? or, as is more probable, did he intend to fix it to his house in order to attract customers?

It will be seen, from the above entry, that the good old-fashioned custom of giving a yearly gift at Easter to the Church, for the Clergy or other sacred purposes, is of considerable antiquity.

It is certain, too, from the payment of candles, quoted above, that the services of the Church were said daily, as the Church of England ordered, and still orders, her Clergy to say them.

REPAIRING CHURCH AND BELLS.

In 1588 the Churchwardens "layde out the sum of £vi. ivd. in repayring the Church, the bells, the Clocke, and the glass windows." It may be that the old stained windows began at this time to be superseded by plain glass. In the same year the names of those who "agreed" with the Churchwardens for "seate roomes in the Church" are given. They number five only. It is probable that at that time the sitting accommodation in Witney Church was limited. There would appear to be reason for supposing that the naves of Churches had been often devoid of furniture in the Middle Ages, and the open spaces must have added much to the beauty

of the fabric. No doubt, the paucity of those who held "seat rooms" in Witney Church may be accounted for by supposing there were few seats in the edifice, the poor bringing portable stools with them. Old Jenny Geddes, at Edinburgh, is reported to have thrown her stool at the head of the officiating minister in the time of Charles I, when the latter endeavoured to introduce a Liturgy into the Scotch Kirk.

It is interesting to observe that in 1590 the large sum of £xxi xvis iid was spent in casting the second bell, and in making alterations to the other bells, "and glassing of the windows." Two years later, "two pottle potts to serve to the Communion table" are in the inventory and during the next few years, all that appears to trouble the peace of the Church-wardens, is the amount of bell metal which they had on their hands, owing to alterations. But in 1596, the two late Church-wardens are called upon to give up racks, bell metal, and other articles to the officials in office. This they appear, for some reason, unwilling to do. At the next year's meeting, the articles had not been sent "home" to the use of the Church, neither had some small sums of money been paid. Then it was decided that the articles, &c., "shall be demanded in love," or "exacted by law." It is probable that the demands made in love, were successful this time, as there is no further mention of the matter.

"At the sayde time also, because it was not agreed of the accompte then to be made. It was

deferred the next day following, which fell out to be St. Mark's Day after evening prayer, at which time the forenamed Churche-wardens brought in their full accompte by bills, approved by those that were assembled in the name of the whole parishe upon publique warning given the sayde day at morning prayer."

The above entry is again evidence that, although Puritan influences had been felt at Witney, yet no difference had been made so far as the daily services of the Church were concerned.

In the next few years some alterations seem to have been made to the fabric of the Church. There is an entry in 1602 respecting "the mendinge of the steeple," and in 1608 there is an entry with regard to "vii oken bordes" left in that part of the Church, and of several loades of timber, given by Mr. James Whittlocke "towardes the repayring of the Church, the same lying in the grene at the Vicaridge door." This would appear to settle the question with regard to the site of the vicarage. A strip of land between the Green and the river, belonging to the Rector, is still called "Vicar's Close," and it is probable that the residence of the Vicar was immediately in front of this, most likely on a portion of the site now occupied by the Church Schools, which are built on glebe land.

Evidently at this period, great alterations were made in the Church, possibly not remarkable for discretion or good taste. In the next year (1609) there is an item in the inventory of Church goods

of "vi. bushels of lyme in the Resurrection Chapell." This entry would seem to show that this Chapel had become a kind of lumber room from the fact that lime was stored in it, also that this was the period, when paintings on the walls of Witney Church were probably covered with whitewash. And, although, there were doubtless, not a few zealots who were pleased to see the despoiling of such works of art, which they supposed ignorantly savoured of idolatry, yet it is only fair to the memory of these early Puritans, to state that there was more than one order made by the sovereign commanding all Churchwardens to cover the inside and outside of Churches with lime as a preventative from the Plague, which was at that period playing such havoc with the health of the people.

In 1613, "2 books of Bishop Jewell's works," "2 books of articles," and "2 books of Canons," are added to the volumes already in possession of the Churchwardens.

The first entry with respect to the Whitsuntide sports occurs in 1620. This appears to have been a source of revenue, for the Church officials state they received li.s. iiiid., and that they laid out this sum in hearse cloth.

In 1628 the revised edition of the Bible made its first appearance, together with "two Communion bookes," and "one booke called ye Parafrases of Erasmus." In 1631 there is a record to the effect that a "dixonaire, price xxiiis., was purchased."

" 1633. Before Mr. White, Curate of the same Churche, Mem. that of the old Churchwardens, by name John Heming and Walter Clarke, of Wittney, Thomas Tate, of Hayley, and Thomas King, of Curbridge, were pained by consent of ye minister Thomas Johns, and the other parishioners the sume of 11d. a piece for their neglect in not bringing in a particular accounte of the poore for ye bread and wine, viz., because they had not a particular note who had payed and who not."

" 1634. Anno. Rege Carol, Anglie.

Before Thomas Dudley, Minister of the said parish.

Item for ringing the great bell for burialls in the whole parish, as appears by the clarke and saxton, their books,

xxvis."

" Item for the first tax for the whole parish for and towards the reparations of the Churche. Taxed the xxii Dec., 1633, the some of the whole ten being

£viii. iii.s. iii.d."

" Item, received of Mistress Burgess as a gift given by the late vicar, Mr. Richard Burgess, her late husband, deceased,

xs."

" Item, received from the whole parish for bread and wyne, viz., of every Communicant 1d, £v. xv. viii." The amount of money collected in this way appears to intimate that in former times, having regard to the difference in population, the Holy Eucharist was partaken of much more frequently than it is now.

" Item given by Richard Harris, late of Hailey, deceased, for and towards the new erecting of gallory in the said Church.

£v."

SMOKE FARTHING.

"For smoke farthinge, due to his Majesty iis."

Smoke farthing, or smoke money, was anciently paid as a composition for offerings, made in Whitsun week by every man who occupied a house with a chimney, to the Cathedral of the Diocese in which he lived. Sir Roger Twisden says that Peter's Pence were abolished by King Henry VIII, but on the grant of those monasteries, to whom they had become payable, they continued to be paid as appendant to the Manors &c. of the persons, to whom granted, by the name of smoke money. In an extract from the Churchwardens' accounts for the parish of Minchinhampton, Gloucestershire, there is the following :—

" 1575. Expendyd at the Byshoppes Vysytacion to the Sumner, for Peter's pence, or smoke farthing, some tyme due to the anti criste of roome. xd."

In 1699, there is the following entry with respect to this tax :—

" Mem., the Thursday before Michmaellmas sessions, 1699, one Stephenson, demanded of ye Churchwardens 2*d*. per year for 4 years past, for smoake farthinge for ye King. But Gustus Pardsen, being Choriman at ye Sessions, Oxon, declared that there was noe Law for it, neither had the King any of the money this Stephenson demanded. Riding charges therfor was not paid then, neither ought any such man to be paide any more."

It would appear that Mr. Gustus Pardsen, engaged as "Choriman" at the Sessions, had

overheard the law on the subject when the matter had been brought before the Justices there. No doubt, this tax and others like it of an unimportant nature, were farmed, i.e. persons like Mr. Stephenson, before mentioned, gave a lump sum for the off chance of collecting these impositions, which it is certain were illegal.

Before this date (1634) "a basin" is mentioned in the Inventory of Church goods. The Puritans hated the sacramental system of the Church in no small degree; the altar was therefore degraded by being moved about the Church, and the Communicants sat round it. In like manner, and in order to degrade the sacrament of regeneration, the fonts were, in many instances, got rid of, or basins were placed in them and used at the administration of the Sacrament of Baptism. Archbishop Parker, writing to Lord Burleigh on Nov. 1573, thus, "I have been of late shamefully deceived by some young men, and so have I by some older men. Experience doth teach. The world is much given to innovations, never content to stay to live well. In London our fonts must go down, and the brazen eagles, which were ornaments in the Chancel, and made for lectures, must be molten to make pots and basins for new fonts."

That this removing of fonts was a common practice seems clear, from one of the injunctions of Elizabeth, Octr. 10th, 1561.

"Item, that the font be not removed from the accustomed place; and that in Parryshe Churches

the Curates take not upon them to confer baptisms in basins, but in the font, customably used."

There are scarcely any entries in the Churchwardens Book from 1640 to 1663. The times were troublesome and full of continual changes. Men knew not what to do for safety. One day King Charles, surrounded by his army, would ride through the town, and everything would point to the success of monarchy, before long these would be followed by soldiers, stern vinegary looking men, of the Parliament, who came to the town, and in all probability took possession of the Church, where one of their number "with the gift of speech" would deliver a long homily, remarkable for red-hot politics and doubtful theology. That Witney Church was visited in some such manner is evident from the following entry :—

"May 1st, 1647. The Surplis and Books of Common Prayer were taken away by the soldiers."

The use of the Prayer Book was prohibited from 1645 to 1660, and if its use were persisted in, it brought a year's imprisonment. For the Puritans no more practised religious toleration than some other Christian bodies before this period and after. The Clergy were turned out of their livings, many of them were exiled, and in place of them came "lecturers," who occupied the clerical nest till the Restoration came. It is certain that such was the case with regard to the majority of livings in England during the Protectorate. But this state of things did not exist at Witney. The Rector retained his cure during the troublesome times, and that probably

without violating his ordination oath in any way. What actually took place is clear from the following quotation, taken from "Palmer's Nonconformist Memorial."

"Edmond Staunton, D.D., told his father (who had given him his choice of the three learned professions) that he esteemed the turning of souls to righteousness the most desirable work in the world, and attended with the greatest reward hereafter, though the others might bring in more wealth and honour here. He first preached a lecture on the Lord's Day afternoon at Witney, in Oxfordshire, about six months, and had encouraging seals of his ministry. His labours were so acceptable that people flocked from all parts to hear him. This was not pleasing to the incumbent, who took the more time in reading prayers that this novel lecturer might have the less time for preaching, and then left the Church ; but he was followed by none, but his clerk, whom he would not suffer to give out the Psalm. Mr. Staunton had preached several times on the text "Buy the truth and sell it not," upon which the incumbent when he met any coming into the Church as he went out, would say, with a sneer, "what, are you going to buy the truth?"

It is clear from the above quotation, that the Rector of Witney was allowed to retain his living, that he read prayers during the services at Church (though whether these were taken from the Prayer Book is doubtful), that, apparently, he was not allowed to preach, and that he was hostile to the lecturer who lived here during the time of the

Protectorate. It is certain that the clergy were treated in a very great many instances harshly, and that they were deprived of their livings. The question then arises “Why should the Incumbent of Witney experience more lenient treatment?” In a former book I wrote with some warmth with respect to the Vicar of Burford retaining his living under exactly similar circumstances. I am glad, therefore, of an opportunity of stating that it is clear to me, that the various clergymen in this neighbourhood were treated less severely than were others in various parts of the kingdom. The reason for this leniency is not difficult to conjecture. Only seven miles from Witney, lived William Lenthall, the Speaker of the Long Parliament. This man was a zealous Churchman, and in the Priory Grounds, at Burford, may yet be seen the ruins of a very beautiful Chapel which he built, and which was consecrated by the Bishop of Oxford, in 1662. Lenthall was intimately connected with Witney. During the Protectorate he was Lord of the Manor, and one Rector of Witney, during this period, was certainly appointed through his influence. This was Ralph Brideoak, who was appointed to the Rectorate during the time of the Commonwealth. There can be scarcely any question that the power and authority of Lenthall were sufficient to protect clergymen of the Church in the neighbourhood, and I am glad of the opportunity of clearing the memory of the Rev. Christopher Glynne, Vicar of Burford, from the aspersions which I, in all honesty, cast on it.

There was another lecturer, during this period, to whom reference has before been made with respect to the catastrophe which happened to the actors from Stanton Harcourt.

John Rowe was born at Tiverton, and educated at New Inn Hall, Oxford, till the troublous times, which obliged him to go to Cambridge. He returned afterwards to Oxford, and obtained a fellowship or Senior Studentship at Christ Church College. He was first employed at Witney, but after a short time he was appointed a preacher at Westminster Abbey. He was ejected from his preferment for Nonconformity, in 1662, and after this period he seems to have had a small congregation in St. Bartholomew's Close. He died in 1677. His last sermon ends thus:—

"We should not desire to continue longer in this world than to glorify God and finish our works and be ready to say, 'Farewell time; Welcome Eternity!' Even so come, Lord Jesus!"

Mr. Rowe was the author of many religious works.

In 1654 Mr. William Gilliat is mentioned as being a lecturer "at W'y." He remained till 1662.

But the tide soon turned. The English people had hardly tasted Puritanism, with its total absence of amusement, before they discovered that it was not at all to their mind, and glad were the people of Witney and elsewhere to regain their Liturgy, and to settle down into their old parochial life again.

The difference in Church matters is intimated again in the Inventory for 1662, when the surplice and three Communion Prayer Books are once more

amongst the effects of the Churchwardens after being absent for several years, and the entries again in the Churchwardens' book are as full and complete as before 1642. In 1663 there is the following :—

“That for the better regulating of the great disorder of the seats in the Church, the present Vicar, and now, Churchwardens, with the Sidesmen, place the Parishioners according to their quality.”

Much better is the present arrangement of seats in Witney Church, where without distinction of “quality” they are free and open to all. However the officials may have managed with regard to “placing people according to their quality” in the 17th century, it is certain that in this latter part of the 19th century it is not quite the kind of enterprise in which even the most popular and powerful Church officials would care to engage themselves. To the credit, however, of Witney and its people, be it said, that this opening of the Church freely to the working classes was, in 1889, thoroughly carried out by the present Rector and Churchwardens with wonderfully little friction or opposition of any kind.

The dread that the fearful pestilence, which has always been known as the Plague, would reach Witney seems to have troubled the townspeople, for in 1665 there is the following entry :—

“Mem. We, the Rector, Vicar, and Churchwardens of ye parish of Witney have thought fit to allow unto Richard Johnson, of this towne, and his family, whom we caused to be shut up for a month and

upwards for fear of infection, of the money collected
ye sume £2 12s. od."

There are several notices, too, of collections that were made on behalf of those who suffered from the infection. Charles II and his Parliament were at this time at Oxford, not far away; and it is very probable that some jaded statesman, or courtier, who had ridden out as far as Witney to take the air, told the tale of the dreadful scenes which were then taking place in the metropolis. If the story of the horrors which then prevailed were only half told, there need be no wonder that Witney people were so far frightened that they resolved to leave no stone unturned in order to keep the pestilence away from the town.

In the same year there is the following:—

"That Moses Pierson ring ye Bell at 4 in ye morning, and 8 at night throughout ye year, and to receive his full years wages from ye Churchwardens proportionably for his paines, 80 shillings for his wages for the first half year, and 30s. for the other half."

Few things more clearly indicate the way in which we have departed from the "early to bed, early to rise" rule of our ancestors than the above entry.

April 30th, 1676.

"We whose names are underwritten do testify that Ralph Weckerlin alias Trumbull, Rector of ye said Church with ye vicarage annexed did upon ye day above mentioned, read ye 39 articles in ye time of Divine Service, and declare his assent, and consent

to ye book of Common Prayer, and he renounced ye obligation to ye Covenant accordingly to ye act of Uniformity of ye 14th of King Charles ye 2nd King."

The Rectory and Vicarage were united in this reign through the influence of Speaker Lenthall, (*Ant. A. Wood*). This peculiarity of the living of Witney being both a Rectory and Vicarage, is not common, though it exists in a few other places. The reason for its existence appears to have been the fact that those who, in early times, gave tithes to the Churches were called Patrons, and they and their descendants acquired the privilege of presenting the Parson. Sometimes this right was given away to Colleges, sometimes to Bishops or to Societies. The latter were frequently in the habit of retaining a part of the income, and of sending down to the cure a clergyman, called a Vicar (i.e. one authorised to perform the functions of another), who was paid by an arrangement made between himself and the particular body whom he represented. The Vicar frequently resided in the Rectorial house, though this, certainly, was not the case at Witney, but it is probable that he was granted a smaller kind of tithe, and that he had other endowments. Vicars were appointed in early times, soon after the Conquest in all probability, and so far as Witney is concerned, they appear, until the commencement of the 17th century, to have had the spiritual charge of the place. The Rector's residence was, in those days, a very inconvenient

structure, and there is no evidence at all from the Churchwardens' book that any rector was in residence till 1640. It would be interesting, if it were possible, to make an accurate list of the Vicars of Witney, but it would be extremely difficult.

In 1683 there is the following curious entry :—

"Itt was agreed that ye Clarke must receive 6d of every one that useth black cloth, which ye Clarke shall have 2d of it for his pains, and 4d to account."

The Ringing Loft was erected in 1699 "by six score persons which raised the sum of £13 15s. od." This is interesting as throwing light on the date of some ornamental woodwork, now couzealed by a wooden ceiling, but said, by those who remember it, to be elaborately decorated both in form and colour, the result, probably, of the efforts of the six score collectors.

Dec. 5, 1703.

Mem. "That Edward Bird of the Parish of Wittney, was declared Excommunicate in the Parish Church of Wittney, the said 5th of Dec., 1703, according to an Injunction from ye Ecclesiastical Court, dated the 24th of Nov., 1703. The said declaration made by Mr. John Moulden, Presbyter of the Church of England.

Ralph Trumbull, Rector,
of Witney."

January 30th., 170³₄

Mem. "That Edward Bird above named being absolved according to a letter received from ye

Register of the Diocese, Mr. Cooper, dated ye 29th of the month was declared absolved ye said 30th of January, 170 $\frac{3}{4}$ in ye said Parish Church of Witney.

Ralph Trumbull, Rector."

In the Commination Office, appointed to be used on Ash Wednesday, we are told that in "the Primitive Church there was a godly discipline that at the beginning of Lent such persons as stood convicted of notorious sin were put to open penance." At the commencement of the eighteenth century, excommunication (the severe punishment inflicted in Edward Bird's case) was usually bestowed for two things—defamation of character, and incontinence. There are many instances recorded of the infliction of penance. The parish book of All Saints, Huntingdon, contain the following:—

"1621, Johannes Tomlinson, Rector, Oliverus Cromwell, filius Roberti, reprehensus coram totam ecclesiam pro factis."

"Jo. Tomlinson, Rector, 1626. Hoc anno Oliverus Cromwell fecit ponitentiam coram totam ecclesiam."

It is a common belief that public penance is quite a thing of the distant past. This is not the case, many instances might be quoted showing that it prevailed up to the middle of the present century.

In 1717 there is the following:—

"H. Price, Curate of Witney, (the Rector being still absent)."

Probably few places have suffered more than Witney from the non-residence of its Rectors. The

absence of the spiritual heads of parishes at this time on account of the holding of several livings, was a fearful scandal. Not only men of low type in the Church, but even those from whom better things might be expected, if the piety which prevails in their writings, can be accepted as an indication of character, scrupled not to get as much preferment as they could, and having acquired it, to keep it as long as possible. Bishop Hoadley appears to have hesitated when asked to give the living of Witney to the younger Freind, but he himself is said to have held the See of Bangor for six years (1716-22) without having visited the diocese at all! But this was in what are called, with a strange irony, the "good old times." Bad times they must have been in religious matters, and their effects are felt now in many places. Public opinion expressed itself pretty strongly with regard to the pluralists, and in 1787 George III wrote strongly to Pitt respecting this evil. It continued, however, down to a few years ago.

CHURCHWARDENS' PRESENTMENTS.

The original Churchwarden's presentments, which have been carefully kept in the Bodleian Library, throw little, if any, light upon Churchmanship in Witney during the latter half of the 18th century. As will be seen, the Churchwardens usually state that "all is well" when it is tolerably safe to assume that there were many affairs connected with the Church which were not well at all. The expression used, may probably be taken as an indication of apathy,

rather than as one which signified that the Church was doing its duty. The presentments are as follows :—

“ 1735. All well.”

“ 1741. All things well.”

“ 1744. That the Rev. Mr. Friend has took down to the ground the Vicarage house in Witney aforesaid.”

“ 1746. The Vickerey House poull'd down.”

This would seem to have been literally the Vicarage House, in “ Vicar's Close.” The Rectory House was not reconstructed by this Dr. Freind, but by his son and successor, William Freind, Rector of Witney, and Dean of Canterbury.

“ 1749. Nothing.”

“ 1750. Edward Bird and Edward Carter, Barber presented for shaving on Sundays.”

“ 1751 to 1814. Nothing to present.”

“ 1815. The Church-yard gates under repair.”

“ 1815 to 1825. Nothing.”

“ 1825. Roof of Porch under repair.”

“ 1833. The roof of our Church requires reparation, but we cannot enter upon the work untill next Spring without interrupting the services of the Church, also that the roof of Wenman's aisle has not been repaired by the descendants of the late Lord Wenman.”

“ 1836. Roofs of Church again want repair, and the water is getting at the foundations.”

The Churchwardens of every parish were by statute made in the 8th year of Queen Elizabeth,

directed to superintend the destruction of "Noysom foule and vermine," but there is no record of the Witney Church officials doing any such thing till 1784, when they disbursed the following sums:—

For 4 foxes	4/-
For 56 doz. sparrows	9/4
For 9 poll cats	6/-

In 1791, it was unanimously agreed that no Churchwarden be allowed any money for destroying of hedgehogs.

In 1813 there is the following:—

"Paid Wyatt for restraining of the children in ye Church, 10s."

An old inhabitant has borne testimony to the fact that the services of old John Wyatt, mentioned in the above extract, were frequently required in Church at the beginning of the present century. But those were old times when great ugly pews were in the Church, affording unusual facilities for irreverent behaviour. Near Wenman's aisle there stood, at the beginning of the century, a row of square pews, called the Prentices' Pews. As was stated in the chapter on the Woollen Trade, every manufacturer was in the habit of keeping one or two apprentices and these worthies were expected to attend Church, at least on the Sunday morning. But, it is recorded that instead of listening to the service, these young men were usually engaged in the game of "Chop Apple," or some other amusement equally diverting. These were "the children," whom old John Wyatt "restrained," and occasionally in the midst of the

stillness, when the sermon was proceeding, a noise to which we are unaccustomed now, would resound through the Church. This was John Wyatt's long cane which had come in contact with the head of some apple-chopping youth. Let us hope that this discipline bore good fruit in after years.

BRIEFS.

These were relics of the time when the power of the Pope was great in England. They were licenses to collect money in Churches, and could be issued at first only by the Roman Pontiff. As will be readily imagined, Henry VIII was too much in need of money to pay his gambling and other debts to allow any system of obtaining money from his subjects to fall into disuse. And so, when the Papal dominion in England came to an end, briefs were issued by the Crown; but they were called by various names, such as "King's Letters," "Queen's Letters," "Letters Patent," &c. The Clergy, and Churchwardens, to whom they were addressed, were specially enjoined to assist in collecting money within their respective jurisdictions. One of the rubrics after the Nicene Creed is, "And here shall all briefs be read." This, of course, has no meaning to us, for briefs have fallen into disuse. Lord Palmerston refused to issue any briefs, even for Incorporated Church Societies, for whose sole benefit they had been issued from the reign of George IV. In truth, they had given rise to very much abuse. In a measure they had been regularly farmed, and a good deal of the

money collected found its way, not to those who had petitioned for a brief, but into the pockets of various officials. Briefs, indeed, during the latter part of the period they were issued, were very little more than financial speculations.

The Briefs, collected in Witney Church, were as follows :—

“ Collections made for Crome, alias Shipden, Norfolk, Grantham in Lincoln, Baring, Southampton, Tynemouth, Northumberland, Limmington, Southampton all these for repairing the Church.”

“ Feb. 1665.

For Thomas Stopper, of Hartpury, Co. Gloucester,
10/-.”

“ April 1st, 1666.

For the Church of Clun, in the Co. of Salop, 5/2.”

“ May 13th.

For a fire in the dwelling-house of Robert Hamlyn, of Shefford Woodland, in the Co. of Berks, 5/-.”

“ July 22nd.

For Warborough Steeple, in the Co. of Oxon, 8/6.”

“ Dec. 2nd.

For fire in ye parish of Bishop Clifton, in the Co. of Devon, 10/-.”

“ April 7th, 1667.

For Mr. John Osborne, Russia Merchant, 14/-.”

“ June 30th.

For ye town of Poole, in Wales, 8/3.”

“ July 10th.

For the inhabitants of Grindle, in the Parish of Riper, Co. Salop, 7/3.”

“Sept. 1st.

For a fire at Laughboro, Leicester, 13/-.”

“July 30th, 1671.

For a fire in the Parish of S. Aldates, in Oxon, 18/10. John Hinton, curate.”

“For the relief of some Refiners of Sugar, dwelling formerly in Coleharbour, in ye parish of Gt. All Hallows, London, who suffered ye loss of above £20,000 by a fire, Sept. 8th, 1671.”

“March 9th, 167 $\frac{2}{3}$.

For a fire which began in ye Theater Royall, in ye parish of St. Martin's in ye Field, London.”

“March 28th, 1675.

Towards the repairs of the parish Church of Newent, in ye county of Gloucester, which fell downe on ye iv of Jan.”

“July 16th, 1677.

Collected from house to house for ye Hungarian Ministers' Brife, in ye Parish of Witney, £2 5s. 8d.”

“August 2nd, 1680.

Collected in ye parish of Witney for ye Brifes for ye captives at Algiers £3 os. 4d.”

“Jan. 27th, 1670.

Ellenor Griffin and John Griffin, children of Ellenor Griffin, were sent to Brassmill, near Shrewsbury.”

“May 23rd, 1686.

Collected in the Parish of Witney for the distressed French Protestants, as commanded in his Majesty's letters patent.”

"July 7th, 1689.

Collected for ye distressed Irish Protestants,
recommended by their Majesty's letters patent,
£26 16s. 11d."

"Feb. 1st, 1701.

For ye repairs of Chester Cathedral £21 1s. 7d."

"Dec. 24th, 1704.

For the Seamen's Widows and Orphans, amongst
the Dissenters, and those of the Church of England
£8 2s. 7d. Whereof among ye Presbyterian Meeting
£1 18s. 6d. ; among the Quakers 18/4.

Mem. That there was ye Sum of 4/- collected
n ye Anabaptist Meeting."

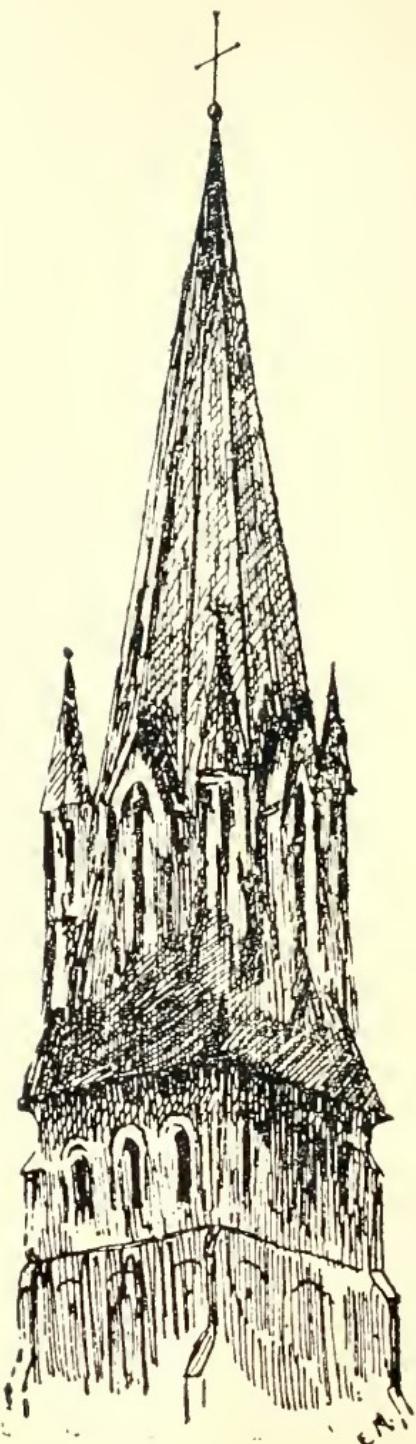
W I T N E Y C H U R C H

stands at the Southern extremity of the town, and
is altogether one of the most beautiful and interesting
edifices in the Diocese of Oxford. Skelton, who
published a very artistic book, entitled "The
Antiquities of Oxfordshire," paid this Church the
compliment of putting a representation of it in the
most prominent part of his frontispiece, a fact which
will convey to the mind of the stranger an idea
of the grandeur and beauty of the structure. It
is possible, and indeed almost certain, that a Saxon
Church stood on the site of the present edifice, although
we are not aware of any positive, historical, and
trustworthy evidence of the fact. It is, as in so many
other similar cases, a matter simply of very great
probability. It was characteristic of Saxon towns to
have more than one Church—Wallingford, Dorchester,

and Standlake for instance had several. That so very ancient a place as Witney should have had no Church is, indeed, against all likelihood. That a Church of considerable size and importance was built here when the Normans had conquered the country admits of no doubt whatever ; all that remains of this building are the porch, the central portion of the walls of the nave, and a few well carved stones (zig-zag and beak-head) built into the walls. The remaining portions are Early English, chiefly, but there are prominent and extensive examples of the two other principal styles of Gothic architecture.

No one can fail to be struck with the impressiveness of the first view of Witney Church. The Early English tower, with its massive turret-pinnacles and tall elegant windows, which somehow or other look so foreign ; the beautifully formed spire presenting an unusual variety of treatment ; the lofty clerestories and majestic transepts with their great windows, with its curious and finely worked band half way up make up a scene as suggestive of thoughts of a distant and more pious past as can be desired by the most earnest student of architectural history.

Naturally it will be asked, "Who were the builders of this Church?" Our answer to the question must necessarily be a purely conjectural one. No document exists which throws any light on so interesting a matter, but it is quite safe to suppose that in the erection of a building of this importance the Bishops of Winchester would have much and powerful influence. Very likely the North porch was



A sketch, by Canon Norris, of one of the two Western spires of Bayeux Cathedral, from which the spire of Witney Church was probably designed.

erected by Bishop Henry, of Blois, a great Church builder, and the remaining parts, perhaps, were raised, as those already mentioned may have been, from the very designs of the Bishops themselves. For in those distant days, while rich and public-spirited laymen were ready to offer the means for building and decorating Churches and Memorial Chapels, dignitaries of high rank, both Monks and Bishops, were often the skilled and able architects; and the many lovely remains of Church, Castle, and Hall, which may be viewed, even now, throughout the length and breadth of the land, were the results of long hours of laborious, and, no doubt, enjoyable study by men eminent in rank and culture. It is therefore not at all unlikely that either the Bishops of Winchester, or some of their attendant Ecclesiastics, drew the plans from which Witney Church was built. The question then arises, "What plans would these men be likely to design?" Now, it must be borne in mind that not a few of them were foreigners, and it is probable that they would come to England impressed with the beauty of the Churches on the Continent, from which their ideas of Ecclesiastical buildings had been largely drawn. What more likely than that the designer of the tower of this Church took Bayeux Cathedral for his model? Certainly the styles are parallel, and there appears to be reasonable ground for such a conjecture. I am indebted for this suggestion to Canon Norris, the present Rector of Witney, who also points to the fact that there was "*terra Baiocensis*" at Coggs, and at Coombe,

in the Witney neighbourhood. But he cannot say how long the property remained connected with Bayeux. Did the association begin as far back as the time of the great Norman Bishop, Odo? It must have been erected some 120 years later than Odo's time. However this may have been, the steeple stands to-day not only a magnificent evidence of the zeal and piety of men in early times, but also an example of some of the purest and best proportions which can be found anywhere in the land. An eminent living architect has tried hard to reproduce it, but has himself owned that he has not succeeded. It is not easy to account for the perfect beauty of proportion observable in the tower and spire at Witney. It has been remarked by one, well able to give an opinion, that as you gaze at the structure the various lines appear, so to speak, to incline inwards, and hence the admirable compactness and symmetry of the whole, due perhaps, largely, to the massive turret-pinnacles which rise from the base of the broach spire at the four angles.

As the Church is approached from the town, the Porch, the earliest part of the fabric, is immediately in front; to your right is the Wenman Chapel with its beautiful ogee floriated doorway, on which, as also on the string-course above, the ball-flower ornament appears. This doorway, and the eastern and western windows of the same chapel, belong, undoubtedly, to the best part of the Decorated Period; on the left, projecting forward, is the North transept, much lengthened by the excellent builders of the 14th

century, with its great North window, a singularly perfect specimen of the flowing tracery of that period ; but it will be seen that the fine gabled roof over it disappeared a century later, to make room for the 15th century clerestory. In the richly carved corner buttresses at the northern angles of the Church are niches which were built originally to receive life-size representations of Saint and Martyr. These latter also belong to the Decorated Period. The Nave is surmounted by the clerestory, which perhaps belongs to the Perpendicular Period ; it is singularly like that in Burford Church. Above all, rises in its strength and beauty the magnificent Early English tower with its noble spire. As one stands in the well-kept Churchyard underneath, how easily the mind goes back in retrospect, and scenes and events, associated with ages gone by, quickly arise, and pass in review. For this old Steeple must have witnessed many strange changes in the town, of which it has for more than six centuries been the chief ornament. It is likely that the very stones used in its earlier construction, were carried to their places by poor Saxon serfs, while the lordly Norman looked on, and superintended. Other scenes it must have beheld, such as that which took place when those, who had little love for the beautiful, caused magnificent work in wood and stone to be pulled down, and committed many other acts of desecration. Firm it has stood till happier times when the services of the Church are held reverently and with simple dignity, as in the ancient times of ecclesiastical

order, long ages ago. Let us hope it will never witness anything but what is creditable to the best traditions of the English race.

The Porch, with its good barrel vaulting and disengaged columns, marking the transition from the 12th to 13th century styles, is a fine example of the skill of the later Norman mason. There was a time, and not so many years ago, when the beauty of this part of the structure was almost destroyed by the accumulation of soil at its base. It is satisfactory to be able to point to the fact that this reproach was entirely removed at the time of the Restoration, some eight and twenty years ago.

INTERIOR.

An ancient well-designed wooden screen divides the xivth century Chapel (now used as a Vestry) from the small North-Western aisle of the nave. This part of the fabric was the private Chapel of Caswell House, to which reference has been made in a former chapter. At all events, as some of the inscriptions still remaining show, it was for a long time the Wenman Mortuary Chapel. There is now, besides some inscribed slabs on the floor, only one mural monument of the Wenmans left, and that is as late as Jacobean times. There is in stone, however, a representation of a priest, with chasuble and stole, and the conventional angels at the head, and hound at the feet, though, from the absence of an inscription, it is, of course, impossible to determine whom it was intended to represent.

The roof of this aisle is poor, and perhaps was constructed in place of an ancient one about forty years ago, when economy rather than beauty was studied.

The following, relating to Witney Church is taken from an Harleian M.S.S. 965. Church Notes. (fol: 14). (1644):—

"At the West end of this Church is a large North Yle, lately reedyfied by Sir. F. Wenman 4 or 5 years since."

The above Chapel was in a dreadful state of dilapidation a few years ago. In the windows were some remains of arms and devices in painted glass; on brackets were fixed two rusty helmets, ancient swords and spears; from the back projected a number of banners with various arms of the Wenman family and its connections, but these were reduced to the merest shreds. Two or three funeral hatchments decorated the walls, and the floor was covered with Monumental slabs. The brasses were removed when Rector Jerram transformed this part of the building into a schoolroom. It is much to be regretted that so many interesting relics of former times were, through carelessness, destroyed or lost!

On leaving this part of the building, if the eye is cast upward towards the wall of the nave, a little circular round-headed window may be seen, which has all the characteristics of Early Norman architecture. It appears clear from this that the main walls of the nave belong to the original Norman Church, which stood before the beginning of the 13th century.

This little window is by no means the only evidence of the truth of this statement. Near the eastern end of the nave, there are, on either side, facing each other, two semi-circular openings, and the only tenable theory respecting these, is, that they are the splays of the headings of two external small windows similar to the one just described, of the original Norman nave. The walls of the latter were, evidently, pierced in the 13th century, with four bays on each side.

In this aisle stands the old Parish Chest, with its three locks. Such a chest as this was used in ancient times for the purpose of storing documents and other articles of value.

The clerestory was added in the 15th century. The view from the Western end of the nave is grand, and impressive. This part of the structure is well lighted by a great Western window, and ten large clerestory windows ; the Chancel, however, appears, when viewed from the West end of the nave, clothed in a "dim religious light," from the fact that it is lighted for the most part by narrow lancet windows, such as were in use in the 13th century, when the glass placed in them was a matter which entered into the calculations of all builders of those early times on account of the expense which attended its manufacture. The arches in the nave are low, and somewhat ineffective, as indeed was bound to be the case, when the particular facts which explain their erection, are taken into account. There is a singular look of baldness about this part

of the fabric, but what it was like when, perhaps, the walls shone with frescoes, and other paintings, must be left to the reader's imagination.

The West window is, unfortunately, a modern erection, and, though the upper tracery is fair, and it would appear that the masons tried to follow the lines of the original perpendicular work, yet this window cannot be said to compare at all favourably with those which were erected in an earlier age. It is filled with stained glass by Wailes, of Newcastle, an artist famous at one time, but whose work contrasts unfavourably with the productions of such painters as Clayton and Bell, Hardman, and Kemp. The bright gay colours are painfully unlike the noble old windows in Fairford Church, not far away, which, might well have been studied as a model. The subjects represented, are scenes from the life of Joseph, this treatment being considered appropriate, as the liberal donor, the late Miss Raine, was the daughter of a steward of the Blenheim Estates.

The extensive roofs of the Church were restored about the year 1848, by the Rev. Charles Jerram, an earnest and generous Rector, one who did excellent work, both material and spiritual, in his day.

The little aisle to the south of the Nave, was erected, probably in the 15th century. There is here a painted window, in memory of Mr. H. C. Townsend and other members of his family, which may be pronounced one of the best modern specimens of its style to be met with anywhere.

FARMOUR'S AISLE.

On one of the massive structures, supporting the tower which faces this aisle, is the remnant of a richly canopied recess of considerable elegance of design. Somewhere near this, a part of the Church was formerly known as Farmour's aisle, perhaps from the circumstance of a family of the name of Farmour using it as their mortuary chapel or chantry ; and in the will of one of the Farmours before referred to, there is a very curious witness to the time of the erection, or re-erection of an aisle in some part of the Church.

Thomas Richards, alias Farmour, Senior, of Witney, ancestor of the present Earl of Pomfret, by his wills, dated September 9th., 1485 "left his body to be buried in the chapel of St. Mary Magdalen, in the Church of Whitney, to the altar in the chancel of the Blessed Virgin Mary in that Church—for my tithes forgotten xx.li., to the building of the aisle of the Blessed Mary Magdalen in the said Church, called Carsewell aisle xx.li.; to Emmote my Wife, cc.li. with my goods and utensils in my house at Whitney; to William my son c.c. marks, and all my lands in Chadlington; to Richard my son c.c. Marks, and all my lands in Filkings and Langford; to Alice, John, and Elizabeth Wenman, children of Emmote my spouse xlviis; all the residue of my goods, lands, &c., until my son come to the age of twenty-one years, I bequeath to Emmote my Wife, whom I constitute my executrix;

and I appoint Sir Richard Harcourt, Knight, supervisor of this my will."

So much uncertainty hangs about the question of where this Farmour's aisle was, that we dare not pronounce any decision. But we shall not be wrong, in all probability, if we ascribe this Southern portion of the fabric, as we see it now, to that period in English History, when the nation was almost riven in two by those who were fighting on behalf of the Yorkists on the one side, and those who were contending for the Lancastrians on the other.

The fine altar tomb of the Wenmans was placed in the curious projecting bay in 1867. It stood for a long time close to the arches between Wenman's Chapel and the adjoining aisle, though, even this, was probably not its original position. It has been thought that it was placed in the north aisle of the nave, one end against the wall, as now. A screen near had been, evidently, cut to receive it, and then it concealed the middle figures by its overlaying timbers. According to one description it stood "between the pillars," as early as 1644, but in other notes taken in 1594, it is thus described :—

"In the Weynman Chappell a faire tombe of marbell with three images of brasse for the manne and two wyves; by his first wyfe he had thre sonnes and thre daughters, and by his seconde wife he had two daughters—About wche tombe is this written in brasse :—"

"Of yor charitie praye for the sowle of Richarde Wenmane, Anne, and Christiane, his wyfe wche

Christiane decessed the xith daye of Aprill, in yere
of oure Lorde God, 1500. And the sayed Richarde
decessed the — day of — the yere of oure Lorde
1510, and the sayed Anne decessed the — day of
— the yere of oure Lorde 15—Manne in what state
that ever thou be, Timor mortis shall trobble thee
for when lest wynest veniet te superare."

The following quotation with respect to the dress
at the time of Henry VIII is of interest, as
indicating the period of the erection of this tomb :—

"MALE. Reaching to the feet was a fur-lined
gown, open in front, but kept together by a belt,
usually turned back from neck to feet to renew the
fur. Sleeves wide, like a surplice. From the belt
a gypciere, or purse, was usually suspended together
with a short rosary. Shoes sharply pointed, but,
from this time onward, heeled sabots were used.
The hair worn long, reaching to the neck."

"FEMALE. Pedimental head-dress temp : Henry VII
Little change till middle of Henry VIII. Exceedingly
stiff and hid the hair. Frontlets of velvet meet over
forehead. The dress had tight sleeves with fur cuffs.
Large embroidered belt, buckled loosely round the
waist, and its ends allowed to hang to the ground.

It may be seen that the dress, above described,
agrees in almost every respect with that of the
figures on the tomb.

Plain slabs to the memory of members of the
Freind family have been placed in the recess near,
though this, of course, was not their original positions.

The inscriptions on them are as follows :—

“ROBERTUS FREIND, S.T.P.
Gulielmi

Rectoris de Croton, in Com: Northampton
Filius

Inter cineres Janæ Conjugis Filiique Caroli
(O carissima nomina !)

Suos etiam conquiescere voluit
Utinam et animæ suæ !
Heu ! Quanto minus innocentia
Locum Illis pariter contiguam
Sperare auderet

Quam tamen utcunque deformatam
Divinæ misericordiæ mediante Jesu Christo

Haud nimium diffisus
Humillime commendavit

Mens. Augusti die 9no Anno Dom., 1751
Natus Annos, 84

Nec longioris desiderio
Multum affectus
Erat

Archididascalus Scholæ Regiæ Westmonasteriensis
Hujus Ecclesiæ non ita pridem Rector
Præbendarius primo Windsoriensis
Deinde etiam Westmonasteriensis
Denique resignati prius Windsoriensi
Ædis Christi Oxoniensis Canonicus.”

“Here lieth the body of William Freind, D.D.,
son of the above named, Robert and Jane, Dean
of Canterbury, and Rector of this Parish, who died
on the twenty-sixth day of November, in the year
MDCCLXVI, aged LI.”

“ H. S. E.
 CAROLUS FREIND
 Egregiæ spei atq; indolis
 Suisq, quibus carissimus fuit,
 Inopina morte præreptus.
 Morum innocentia Puer
 Recte sentiendi facultate
 Et Pietatis Habitu
 Ultra annos cælo maturus
 Parentibus Fratrique
 (Heu jam Unico, Q.D.C.)
 Superstiti
 Multum defletus desideratusq;
 Obiit, Jul. 16, 1736.
 Currente anno Ætatis 16.”

There is also a mural monument to the memory of Jane, wife of Robert Freind, once Pastor of the famous Reformed Church of Charenton, near Paris, who, upon the persecution of the protestants under Louis XIV, took refuge in England, and was made Prebendary of Westminster.

THE SOUTH TRANSEPT

has on its southern end the finest perpendicular window to be found in this Church. It is somewhat less in width than its western neighbour in the nave, but its height appears to be fully equal; its very tracery seems to suggest stained glass, and when the window is filled with this, the Church will gain greatly in effect, for it still needs colour. The interior arch, now blocked up, was the entrance to

some Chapel or Chantry, which formerly stood here, running parallel with the chancel.

It would seem that in ancient times this Chantry was deemed private property, and, on the removal of some remains of the building in 1820, certain persons from Bristol put in a claim for the property, and made a protest against its destruction. Previous to its demolition, it seems to have been used as a library of Reformation treatises, old chained Bibles, &c. Canon LXXX ordained that a Bible of the largest volume, the Book of Homilies, and the Book of Common Prayer, were to be put in every Church, so that people might read them if they pleased. There are several of these Church libraries still to be seen, though perhaps their use is obsolete. A portion of this structure was possibly in earlier times the dwelling place of the Chaplain or Chantry priest.

It is easy to trace, even now, the line of junction here between new and old work. Close to this interior arch, facing west, is an old piscina, the heading of which has a plain bead moulding and no cusps. Near are a pair of shallow recesses reaching down to the floor, very curiously canopied with light and elegant tracery of detached and open work. The back wall was painted, probably early in the 16th century, and there is a representation of the pomegranate, the symbol of Queen Catharine of Aragon. The period immediately preceding the Reformation was a very spirited one, so far as Church adornment was concerned, and it is certain that in many

parts of the kingdom much restoration and beautifying of Churches went on. What is more likely than that this zeal should manifest itself in Witney, and induce the Churchmen here to spend their money on such examples of the mason's craft and decorator's skill. There appears to be no doubt that these recesses were used for the purpose of containing memorial altars. Above is a pair of lancet lights, the slender side pillars of which are not completely detached. Near is an aumbry, exhibiting indications of the hinges for two doors ; its use was manifestly to keep the vessels, employed in the service of the two altars in this part of the Church. A doorway near would originally give entrance to a court yard, which may have been a kind of ambulatory for the priests engaged in the Church.

The clerestory of this aisle is lighted by ten very small windows with simple quater-foil tracery, five on each side.

Before leaving this part of the fabric, the visitor should go to the extreme south end of this transept. There he may see such a view as can be obtained in few country parish Churches. The plain, but majestic high-pitched arches, which support the tower and spire (narrower than those on the East and West) are seen, and, further on, the beautiful decorated window of the North Transept, with the effigies of those who were perhaps buried beneath, some five centuries ago. The interior length from North to South is about 135 feet.

THE CHANCEL.

Next we come to the Chancel, which has regained much of the architectural character which was given to it in the 13th century. The three lancet-shaped windows on the North are pure Early English, (date 1220, according to Mr. Parker, see *Glossary of Architecture*, where there are engravings of portions of Witney Church) but the decorated window on this side is an insertion, though an early one, belonging probably to the 14th century. The three lancet lights in the East wall are modern, though probably similar to those which originally adorned the Sacrarium at its first erection. They were admirably designed by Mr. Street, the Royal Academician, when restoring the Church, to take the place of a former debased window, which was out of harmony with the rest of the Chancel. The following interesting history belongs to the painted glass of two of the windows on the North side:—

The present Rector, a few years ago, received a visit from a gentleman who described himself as a descendant of the Wenmans who had lived at Caswell House. The erection of the new reredos was then proceeding, and Mr. Wenman, whilst being shown over the Church by Canon Norris, intimated that he would be glad to subscribe to the work. The Rector, however, stated that there was a sufficient sum in his hands for the purpose, but said that if the stranger really wished to do something for the Church in which his ancestors had doubtless worshipped

centuries ago, the placing of a stained window in the edifice would be a graceful act. Mr. Wenman readily fell in with the suggestion, leaving the subjects and artist to be chosen by the Rector. The consequence has been that two very good windows have found a place on the North side of the Chancel. In one, St. Michael is represented, spear in hand, and with his foot on the dragon, and in the other St. Paul with the traditional sword ; the blue cock and the anchor from the Wenman crest and arms also appropriately find a place here.

The Reredos may be said to be, perhaps, as excellent an example of the sculptor's skill as can be found anywhere in this part of the country. The statues are of white alabaster, delicately accentuated with gold. The Saviour is represented in the central group with an angel on either side ; the other figures represent the Blessed Virgin Mary, and St. John, St. Mary Magdalene, and St. Peter. These are placed in small recesses enriched with all the carver's art. The whole symbolizes the doctrine of our Lord's Resurrection, and leads up to the further scriptural truths in the painted glass above. The subjects of the East Window lights are as follows, commencing from the bottom :—

- (1). The Angel announcing the Resurrection to the Maries.
- (2). The walk to Emmaus.
- (3). The unbelief of Thomas.

In other compartments are also the "Noli me tangere," (Touch me not,) "The Eucharistic mea-

at Emmaus," and the "Miraculous draught of Fishes." Next above these is a representaton of the Ascension, and, higher still, the figure of the Redeemer enthroned in Heaven, represented with peculiar grandeur of treatment,—the orb of the world surmounted by the Cross of our Redemption in His Right Hand, and the symbols of the four Gospels above His Head, and under His Feet, while in the highest space of the central light is the sacred emblem of the Lamb of God. On either hand, in the side lights, are the holy Angels swinging censers, and thereby witnessing to the Godhead of Christ. The following inscription is taken from a brass near "To the Glory of God, and in memory of Augustine Batt, M.D., son of Edward Augustine Batt, surgeon. The reredos of this Church, was erected by his fellow-townsman and friends, amongst whom he laboured with zeal and love for thirty years. 1883."

In the South wall are two lancet-shaped windows also filled with stained glass. They represent the Angel of the Resurrection and the Visit of the Holy Women to the Sepulchre, the Commission of St. Peter and the delivery of the Pastoral Staff to him by our Divine Redeemer.

The following inscription, on brass, has reference to these last mentioned windows. "The two windows on the South wall of the Chancel of this Church are dedicated to the Glory of God in thankful remembrance of the ministry of Francis Macaulay Cunningham, Rector of Witney from 1864 to 1879, and as a token of sympathy with him in the death

of his son, Francis Edward, late Government advocate at Rangoon, British Burmah, who fell asleep in Christ May 19th, 1877, aged 32."

There is here also a curious opening in the stonework of the jamb of the Priests' door. This, it has been thought, was formerly used for burning the cloth of extreme unction.

The Organ is a first rate instrument ; part of it has been in Witney Church for many years, and used to stand in front of the great West window. There is a story to the effect that both this instrument, and an old Reredos, which formerly found a place in this Church, were brought from the Portuguese Embassy in London, in 1794. Several large waggons were loaded, it is said, with the materials, and their arrival was hailed with the acclamations of the people, and the ringing of the bells. This Organ was built by Schnetzler, who was also the builder of the organ at the University Theatre at Oxford. But whatever may have been the earlier local history of the older portions of the present splendid instrument, its excellence is practically due to Mr. E. Walker, the well-known organ builder whose name it very properly bears, so thorough was its reconstruction and enlargement at the time of the Restoration of the Church. To Mr. Martin, of Oxford, also, it owes much in recent additions and costly improvements, defrayed by subscription and by the generous gifts of a lay parishioner who desires his name not to be given.

The following is taken from one of the Parish Registers :—

“ Memorandum, March 12, 1716. I, Mr. Stephen Hemming, musick-instrument-maker, promise the day and year above mentioned, to give an organ to the Parish Church of Witney, if I recover the estate of Mr. William Hemming of Antegua, deceased, and that the goodness of the organ shall be proportionable to what I receive from the estate of my deceased Uncle, aforesaid.”

There does not appear to be any evidence that this proposed thank-offering was ever paid ; it may be concluded, therefore, that the estate in Antigua was not recovered by the claimant.

The roof of the Chancel is quite modern, but an excellent imitation, in all probability, of the one which stood here originally. Like the Eastern triplet, under Mr. Street’s direction at the restoration, it was substituted for the somewhat debased work of the 15th century, which had previously prevented the fine proportions of the Early English Chancel from being understood.

THE STEEPLE.

Four Early English high-pitched arches, of singularly fine proportions and majestic simplicity, with massive piers of solid masonry, on which traces of colour still remain, support the tower and spire.

The spire is what, in Leicestershire and elsewhere, would be called a Broach, that is, it springs from the tower without any intermediate parapet. It rises to a height of about 156 feet from the ground ; so it

may be imagined what a huge superincumbent weight the four lancet arches, opening into the Church, have to support. The arches are finished at their spring with a plain abacus.

Above is the present ringing chamber, with its floor decorated below as a ceiling, with questionable taste, at some late period. But this is hidden by a lower ceiling of thin boards, put up at the time of the restoration.

The ringers' chamber has a triforium passage running round, reached from a cleverly planned staircase, which also goes up the tower. The staircase is at the South-East angle, and in former times gave approach to the four sided roodloft, the landings of which may be still discovered in the stonework. The staircase, eventually, blends itself into the buttress upon the Eastern face of the tower. All this is pure and good 13th century architecture.

The triforium is very remarkable. Its arches are gable shaped, and moulded in two orders. The belfry windows are Early English lancets, with labels. Those in the West are not so tall, the weather cornice below being also raised, indicating that the old high-pitched nave roof was somewhat steeper than that of the Chancel. The tower is finished by a corbelled cornice, weathered twice above, before the spire is reached; the pinnacles are octagonal, with beads at angles, and are decorated with nail-heads and trefoils, the spires being finished with heavy finials. But what attracts universal attention is the great elegance of the spire-lights,

which are considered to be of exquisite design. They are in two panels, with a dividing transom in the centre, with trefoil heads, and a plate tracery quatre-foil in the gable, on the apex of which is some double plated crestings of bold composition. The spire is broken midway with some small openings, and a band having sculptured bosses where it meets the roll of the spire. The spire is finished in a foliated finial and weather-vane.

On one of the walls that support this lantern is a very appropriate marble monument, illustrative of the parable of the Good Samaritan. Underneath is the following inscription :—

“In Memory of Edward Augustine Batt, late of this town, Surgeon. He died October 22nd, 1853, aged 53 years.”

“His professional career extended over a period of nearly thirty years, and was distinguished by a rare combination of zeal, ability, and success. This monument is erected by friends to whom he had endeared himself by his many social qualities, and genuine goodness of heart, as a memorial of their gratitude for the services of a life of incessant and unwearied devotion to the alleviation of bodily suffering.”

THE NORTH TRANSEPT.

In journeying from the Chancel to this part of the Church, two lancet shaped arches with projecting drip stones on the Eastern wall, and ornamented with slender columns quite detached from the wall, on each side of the splays, first claim

attention. In the place of one of the lancets a three light window has been inserted, filling the whole internal arch ; its form is peculiar, having the three lights subdivided into six, at the bottom as well as at the top. Beneath this there is a reredos of three unequal arched recesses, and in one of the intervals of stonework is a place for the reception of, perhaps, a plate of silver. A row of nine small cusped panels is below the centre, filled with a well carved boss, the rest with open quartre-foils. The painting of the glass in the window above is excellent, the harmony of colour being surely perfect. A great interest attaches to this, and the S. John Baptist window next to it. They were lately erected in memory of two Mr. Wrights, father and son, by the widow of the latter, resident in Philadelphia, U.S.A. The father was originally connected with the Blanket trade of Witney.

All the painted windows which have been given during the last 15 years (except one by Hardman, offered in memory of Mr. Bateman, of Asthall Manor by his widow) are the work of Messrs. Clayton and Bell, 311, Regent Street. An ancient piscina is near, and above is a shallow recess, which, possibly, may have contained two statues in a past age. The old colouring remains—a black ground with white flowers and a trade mark of some wool merchant, as it seems—On the chamfered jambs is a rose coloured ground bearing white conventional lilies.

This North Transept is remarkable for having had at its Northern termination a crypt, or undercroft.

In the North wall are two plain arches, beneath which, by right of foundership, it would seem that the builders of the Chapel were interred. It was the fashion, during the period of the use of the Decorated style, for mortuary arches to be inserted, but they appear never to have been put anywhere except in the North walls. Above these mortuary arches are two rich monumental arches, with horizontal heads, supporting the sill of the beautiful seven light window. These are filled in with ogee, arched, and skilfully designed, cusped tracery, and contain recumbent effigies of a man and woman. One who visited the Church in 1644, has left a record to the effect that the old clerk told him, that it was at that time believed that they represented the founders of the Chapel and crypt. It may be that they were monuments to the Auditor or Steward of the Witney Palace of the Bishops of Winton.

In the West wall of this aisle there is a curious aumbry, more than five feet in length, but with only a small door opening. Here in troubled times gold and silver altar-plate may have been hidden.

In the little aisle to the West of this transept there is an ancient altar-shelf with niched reredos, of simple, but good, execution.

Near this ancient reredos is a painted window, under which is a brass plate which has on it the following inscription :—

“ To the Glory of God, and in memory of Henry Bateman, of Asthall, and Witney, at rest December

3rd, 1881. This window was presented by his widow."

On the other side is a door leading up to the small room over the porch, where a caretaker or some official, might in old times guard the Church. This parvise chamber is of quaint workmanship, and there is a small interior window in the South wall, apparently to enable the custodian to see any persons who entered the Church below.

THE BELLS.

Some information with respect to the Bells, which were formerly in use at this Church, may be found by referring to an earlier part of this chapter. Those, which are at present in this edifice, retain, with one exception, the following original inscriptions :—

- | | |
|---|--------|
| "1. Augustine Batt, Thomas Sanders, | 1765." |
| "2. Prosperity to the Church of England. | 1755." |
| "3. May the Church for ever flourish. | 1761." |
| "4. Anthony Geeves, Arthur Brooks,
William Wearing, Philip Box,
Churchwardens, Henry Bayley
made me January the first. | 1731." |

(This Henry Bayley was a noted bell-founder. He lived originally at Chalcomb, but afterwards removed to Witney.)

- | | |
|---|--------|
| "5. Thomas Doone, Michael Dolley,
Churchwardens. | 1765." |
| "6. Prosperity to the Parish, and the
trade thereof. | 1755." |

- "7. William Smith, William Tanner. 1660."
 "8. I, to the Church the living call,
 And to the grave I summon all,
 J. N. Lawrence, Henry Salmon,
 Churchwardens. 1815."
 "J. Mears, London, Fecit."

During the present Rectorate, however, the fourth bell, being defective, was re-cast with the following inscription :—

"Recast by Bond, Burford, Oxon, 1885, W. Foxley Norris, Rector, J Habgood, J. Stoddart, Churchwardens," and the motto "Gloria tibi Domine." The Bell Chamber, also, has been made more comfortable for the ringers, and a peal-board erected. There is a promising corps (affiliated to the Diocesan Guild) who have made considerable progress in scientific ringing.

CLOCK AND CHIMES.

The Clock, which is a capital specimen, was purchased by subscription in 1875. There are few places which have such excellent chimes as Witney. They were placed in the Church through the generosity of the late Mrs. Warrington and her nephew, the Rev. J. H. Usill, in memory of Mr. Leonard Warrington. Messrs. Gillett & Bland, of Croydon, were the engineers and designers of the curious and complicated machinery ; and when first used there was a carillon which played fourteen tunes. In process of time the tunes became out of order, and were replaced by seven new ones. Since then, seven more have been added by Mr. F. S.

Walter, the present custodian of the Clock and Chimes.

RECTORS OF WITNEY.

The present Rector of Witney, has compiled an approximately correct list of his predecessors, almost from the commencement of the 13th century. This list he has written on parchment, and, very properly, placed in the porch of the Church. In the attempt to make a record of those who had preceded him in the Rectorate, he was very largely assisted by the laborious investigations of the late Mr. Langford, of Eynsham, who had searched very carefully through the copies of the Lincoln Registers, preserved in the Harleian MSS. Department of the British Museum.

1209. Humphrey de Midliére.

1219. Dionysius.

He was presented to the living, on the resignation of Master Humphrey. The King gave orders to Thomas de Langley (who probably lived at the place, which was notable as being the Hunting Lodge of several of the Sovereigns of England) to allow Robert Arsic, baron of Coggs to give and sell timber to this Rector of Witney, who also seems to have occupied the position of Clerk to the Bishop of Winchester. It may be that the Dionysius had much to do with the splendid re-construction of Witney Church in the 13th century.

1227. Helyas de Glovernia, or as we should now say—Elias of Gloucester. He was a sub-deacon presented by Bartholemew of Winchester.

1236. William de St. Mary Church, official of the Bishop of Winchester.

1243. Ralph Grosset, or Grosstête.

As this Incumbent was of the same name as the Bishop of Lincoln; it is likely he was also of his kindred.

How interesting would it be to learn that the noble steeple of S. Mary's was originally designed by Bishop Grosstête, in whose vast Diocese it then was!

1250. Peter of Cambray.

1261. William Vacce.

This was the Rector through whom an attachment was issued against the Bishop of Winchester for transgressing the Forest Laws, by taking venison, and grubbing the wood-land in Witney Chase, to which reference was made in a preceding Chapter. This Rector appears to have presented the first Vicar of Witney.

1310. William Vacce, a nephew of the former. He was presented by "Papal provision."

1318. Thomas de Tessunt. He appears to have exchanged with the previous Rector for the living of Hagworthingham.

1336. John de Orleton. Preb. of Hereford.

No doubt this Rector was a relative of Adam de Orleton, at this time Bishop of Winchester.

1338. John Trillet. Preb: afterwards Bishop of Hereford.

1340. Ralph Folliot.

1359. Robert de Wykford, Archdeacon of Winchester. In 1375 Archbishop of Dublin.

1362. John de Cricklade.

1369. John French. He exchanged with the last mentioned Rector, for the living of Wythendon. But he soon made another exchange; this time for the Rectory of Uppingham in Northamptonshire.

1370. John de Kellseye, Preb. of Lincoln.

1378. Nicholas de Wykeham. He was probably a nephew of William of Wykeham, who presented him with the living. He was Rector 36 years, and it is most likely that considerable alterations and improvements took place in the Church during his long Rectorate. Perhaps most of the beautiful 14th century additions were made by him. This Rector was at one time warden of New College, and Archdeacon of Winchester.

1414. John Frank, Archdeacon of Suffolk.

1422. Robert Catryk. Preb. of Lichfield.

1442. William Escour.

1446. John Cokkys. Preb.: of Lincoln. Rector 30 years. He was presented to the living by William of Waynflete, an ecclesiastic, high in favour with the unfortunate Henry VI. The latter was so anxious to obtain his favourite's admission to the see of Winchester that he dispensed with the "Papal provision," an act which illustrates the independent spirit of our Kings in spite of the domineering authority of the Court of Rome.

It would seem that this Rector was the brother or nephew of the Lady Grey, whose maiden name was Elizabeth Woodville, and who on her second marriage became the Queen of Edward IV. It is pleasant

to tell, without venturing to treat it as history, how the King of England first met, and lost his heart to this lady while hunting near Witney, in Wychwood Forest.

1475. Lionel Woodville, afterwards Bishop of Salisbury.

1479. Edward Cheyney, D.C.L., Dean of Salisbury

1502. Nicholas West, L.L.D. He had been Curate of Yelford. In 1515 he was raised to the see of Ely, and in 1585, the remains of the late lamented Bishop of Ely (Woodford) were interred in the vault which had sheltered for nearly four centuries, those of Bishop West, once the Rector of Witney.

1515. George Gray.

1519. Richard Sydner, Archdeacon of Tomers, Canon of Windsor, &c. The arms of this Rector were formerly emblazoned in the East window of the Chancel, and in 1594 they were copied by a visitor. The inscription on the glass was—"Pray for the soul of Mr. Richard Sydner Anno Domini 1534."

1529. John Higdon, D.D., Preb. of Magdalen College, and then Dean of Cardinal College (Ch. Ch.)

1532. Edmund Steward, L.L.D., Dean of Winchester.

1581. John Underhill, B.D., also Vicar of Bampton. Rector of Lincoln College, and afterwards Bishop of Oxford, 1589. He appears to have retained the Rectory of Witney "the actual cure of which was with the Vicar."

1614. Humphrey Ailsworth.

1635. Robert Hill.

1638. Dr. Thomas Jackson, also Prebendary of Winton, and Dean of Peterborough. It is said he was appointed to this living mainly through the influence of Archbishop Laud, who seems to have had very much power over this Rector of Witney. Dr. Jackson's views, at first, were decidedly Puritanical, but under the power of Laud and Neile they changed, so that he incurred the displeasure of the Presbyterians, especially of Prynne. At Laud's trial he was described as "a known Arminian." Anthony à Wood, (*Athenæ Oxon.*) says "He was a person furnished with all learned languages, arts and sciences, metaphysics which he looked upon as a necessary hand-book to Divinity." Southee describes him "as the most valuable of our English divines," and Pusey asserted that he was "one of the best and greatest minds our Church had nurtured." Dr. Jackson was instituted to the living of St Nicholas, Newcastle, in 1623, and there he appears to have resided principally. He had been designed originally for a commercial career, and Fuller the Church Historian and this Rector's very intimate friend says in connection with the holding of the living of Newcastle, that Jackson became "a factor for Heaven, where he was once designed a merchant." This Rector was the author of several theological works, but he will always be remembered for his Commentary on the Apostles Creed—a work of great learning and research. On an edition of this important treatise the late lamented Dr. Norris, Archdeacon of Bristol and only brother o

Canon Norris, of Witney, was engaged at the time of his death. Dr. Jackson was buried in Corpus Christi Chapel, but no stone remains to his memory.

1640. Thomas White, who seems to have continued Rector during the dark and heavy days for the English Church, between 1640 and 1655.

1655. Ralph Brideoak.

The following is summarised from Antony à Wood :—

Ralph Brideoak made acquaintance with Lenthall by earnestly applying to him on behalf of the Earl of Derby ; and Lenthall, finding him to be a man of parts and business, made him his own chaplain and preacher at the Rolls, in spite of clamour about his being a malignant. Afterwards Lenthall, being Lord of the Manor of Witney, made him Vicar (*sic*), where being settled he preached twice every Lord's Day, and in the evening catechised the youth in his own house, outdoing in labour and vigilancy any of the godly brethren in those parts. Through Lenthall he procured the annexation of the Rectory to the Vicarage. Lenthall sent for him when on his death bed in his remorse for the part he had taken against the King. He appears to have conformed to the Presbyterians before this time, and was made minister of S. Bartholomews by the Exchange, London, where holding forth, preaching and laying about him in the pulpit, he equalled any of the holy brethren in the city. After the Restoration, he was rapidly promoted, and as Wood intimates was at last, by means of disreputable bribery, made Bishop of

Chichester in 1675. This person, who had spent the chief part of his life in continual agitation for the obtaining of wealth and settling a family, died in 1678, and was buried in St. George's Chapel, Windsor.

The following, too, is of some interest respecting this Rector :—

“1655. Jan. 8. Col. Thos. Kelsey to the Council gave a caveat against Mr. Brideoak, presented to Witney by Speaker Lenthall.”

“(1). Upon a complaint of some honest men, of Witney, that he was a Cavalier and a dull preacher.”

“(2). He was Chaplain to the late Earl of Derby and was in Lathom House, a garrison for the King.”

“(3). He was desired by Dr. John Gurdon to preach at Peter’s Westminister, but Mr. Strong, their preacher there, refused to suffer such a person to preach in his pulpit. Afterwards the Governor gave leave, but his preaching of unsound doctrines gave much dissatisfaction, and, as Mr. Scobell states, was little less than Popery.”

“(4). He was afterwards sent to Long Moltor Parish, Norfolk, but, being disliked, Mr. Gurdon wrote to Mr. Scobell to prevent his being settled there.”

“(5). Col. F. Mergill, M.P., a gentleman of Norfolk, told me that his sermons were stuffed with many sentences out of Grotius and some Jewish Rabbis, and very dull and unprofitable, and that the honest people were much troubled there. The Colonel coming to London, made enquiry after him, and found by Thos. Brown, grocer, in Wood Street, that a customer of his, living in Warrington, in Lancashire,

was taken prisoner and carried near Lathom House, where Brideoak was, and Brideoak wished the late Earl Ashby to hang him up, saying he was a Puritanical rogue."

"(6). Brideoak has promised that he will never come to settle in Witney without consent of the honest people there, which people are very much troubled at his coming, as appears by a certificate in your hands." (*Cal. of State Papers by Mr. Green, 1655*).

1676. Ralph Trumbull, (alias Weckerlin), Rector thirty-two years.

1708. Richard Duke, Prebendary of Gloucester, and Proctor in Convocation. Dr. Felton says "he was a bright example in the several parts of writing, whether we consider his original, his translations, paraphrases, or imitations." He was admired by many, not only as a Divine, but as a Poet.

1711. Robert Freind, D.D. This was a very distinguished Rector. He was Head Master of Westminster School, and a very successful and able teacher; indeed the social position which he acquired made Westminster School the favourite place for the education of the aristocracy. A portrait of this Rector may be seen at Christ Church, and in the library of the same College there is a bust of him, as there is also one at Westminster School. He was a good scholar, though it would seem that Pope sneered at his learning, for in the *Dunciad* the following passage occurs:—

"Let Freind affect to speak as Terence spoke,
And Alsop never but like Horace joke."

What Pope, with his harsh judgment of men and things, may really have thought of Freind is of no particular interest. The works of Robert Freind yet remain for the discernment of those who are calculated to judge of such matters. Certainly Freind appears to have, somehow or other, acquired the enmity of "the little wasp of Twickenham." The former is said to have written several epitaphs, and this fact drew from Pope the following epigram :—

"Freind for your epitaphs I grieve,
Where still so much is said,
One half will never be believ'd,
The other never read."

His house at Westminster was the resort of all the wits and famous men of the time. Swift in his journal to Stella says, "To-night at six, Dr. Atterbury, and Prior, and I, and Dr. Freind, met at Dr. Robert Freind's house, at Westminster, who is Master at the School." The other Dr. Freind mentioned, was a brother of the Rector of Witney, and a celebrated physician. Robert Freind was buried in Witney Church, where a mural tablet may be seen to his memory.

1751. William Freind, D.D. The former Rector resigned his living, and through the influence of the Queen, and Lady Sundon, succeeded in making it over to his son. Bishop Hoadley, the notorious latitudinarian of those times, when asked to confer the living on William Freind, made the following laconic answer "If Dr. Freind can ask it I can grant it." This Rector was Dean of Canterbury,

and Rector of Islip, as well as of Witney. He is described as a man of integrity, modesty, and benevolence, with a very fine taste in music. He died a wealthy man, having inherited the greater part of the fortune of his uncle, the physician. He did not reside at Witney, and it is probable that the same remark might be made about several of the preceding Rectors, for though the living of Witney was, in those days, a very valuable one, yet the Rectory House, as before stated, was an unpretentious and inconvenient structure. So in compensation for his non-residence, Dr. William Freind built the present large and commodious Rectory. He, doubtless, satisfied his conscience by the particular course he adopted, but how the parishioners of Witney would be compensated for the years when they were without a spiritual head, is a difficult query to answer. He also built Hailey Chapel of Ease, now an ivy-mantled ruin, its place being taken by a good new Church, erected through the zeal of the late vicar, Mr. Rolfe, on another site, and designed by his son.

1771. Henry Phipps Weston. The present Rector has acquired for the Rectory (through the kindness of their owners) two oil paintings, one of Rector Weston, and the other of his wife.

1795. Hon. Edward Legge, L.L.B. This Rector was consecrated Bishop of Oxford in 1815. His portrait is at Cuddesdon Palace.

1797. Robert Barnard. This Rector was also non-resident. He is said to have held three other

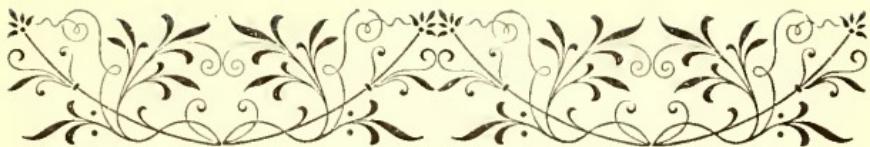
cures besides that of Witney. The Rev. John Hyde during this period attended to the spiritual wants of the Parish. The latter was also Rector of Carfax Church, Oxford.

1834. Charles Jerram. Formerly Rector of Cobham, Surrey. He was a zealous and able preacher. He caused to be erected two small chapels, one at Curbridge and the other at Crawley; and the Church of Holy Trinity on Woodgreen. The roofs of the Parish Church of St. Mary were also restored at a cost of between £3000 and £4000. He too, by his personal influence, abolished the practice of shopping on Sunday morning.

1853. Richard Sankey. The Schools on Vicar's Close, Church Green, were built during his Rectorate.

1863. Francis Macaulay Cunningham. By the efforts of this Rector the Church was renovated and restored to much of its original grandeur. Early Celebrations and daily services in the Church were also established during this Rectorate. The Glebe House, too, was greatly improved and thoroughly restored, and the old Churchyard levelled and tastefully planted.

1879. William Foxley Norris, Rural Dean, Hon. Canon of Ch. Ch. (1890). During his Rectorate the National Church Schools have been twice enlarged; the beautiful Reredos in the Parish Church has been erected, and twelve windows filled with stained glass. The whole of the seats in the Church have also been freed from private appropriation.



CHAPTER VII.

Nonconformity and Witney.

IT is certain, as may be seen from the chapter dealing with Ecclesiastical Witney, that in the 16th century there were many in this town whose ideas of worship and of ritual were not in accord with the teaching of the Established Church. But for years they continued in that Church, and endeavoured by every means in their power to introduce such reforms as their consciences directed. As is well known, persecution attended their efforts. Centuries before this, however, persecution had commenced; for that weak prince, Richard II, was wheedled into staining our history with the record of violence offered to a man for the freedom of his judgment in matters relating to faith and worship. The part some of the Witney people took in their endeavours to abolish various rites and ceremonies in 1521, has been already referred to. Then came

the Reformation, started on so wrong a principle, the object of Henry VIII being merely to cast off the authority of the Pope, and to set up his own, without any reference to matters of doctrine at all. History is silent with regard to the share Witney people had in events of some importance to themselves, and to everyone in the land, which soon ensued. Whether any of its inhabitants suffered for objecting to the Act of Supremacy ; whether there were those, who in the reign of Mary were willing to give up their lives for the Truth's sake, we do not know. It is probable there were such, for it was these people, or those who thought like them, who later became known as the Puritans.

In 1659 there is evidence that the Quakers had established themselves in the town. About this period, a Friend, by name John Guiles, visited the place, and not long after Richard Greenaway and Thomas Looe also came to the blanket-making town. It was the ministry of Thomas Looe, at Oxford, which first reached William Penn, then an undergraduate at Christ Church, and induced him to come into closer connection with the society. Later on it inspired him with such love for its doctrine that he braved the knife of the savage in the back woods of America, rather than give up his right to worship God in the way in which his conscience directed.

Richard Greenaway and Thomas Looe were received at Witney by Kester Hart and his wife, and the latter were convinced of the blessed truth in

which they lived and died." Meetings were for several years held in their house, and when the present Meeting House was first erected, John Hart, the son of the former mentioned pair, made over a quarter-of-an-acre of his property, adjoining the Chapel, to the Society. This John Hart was one of the passengers who sailed with Mr. Penn in the "Welcome" to Pennsylvania, and his name occurs in the list of those elected members of the first Assembly in that distant land. (1683).

About the year 1675, the number of Friends had increased so much in the neighbourhood, that for the sake of discipline, monthly meetings of men and women were established. Witney was a convenient centre for such a cluster of meetings, and, although there can be no doubt at all that in various parts of the country there were inconveniences which attended the belonging to this sect, in Witney the members appear to have escaped, to a large extent, any persecution whatever. In the Record book, belonging to the Society, the only circumstance there mentioned, which can be said in any way to savour of persecution, is an entry in 1674 to the effect that nine Quakers were fined 5/- "for being present at a meeting at Alvescott, which was broken up by Justices John Gower, of Weale, and John Lunn, of Clanfield, with Walter Powell, priest, of Alvescott, as informer, and others." Indeed, so far as the Church of England at Witney was concerned, the Friends appear to have been treated with unusual consideration, and it is evident, from

numerous entries such as the following, which occur frequently in the Register of Deaths belonging to Witney Church :—" buried amongst ye Quakers," —that a special part of the Churchyard was set apart for the Friends' own use. This was the treatment so far as Witney was concerned. Very different was that which these inoffensive people experienced in other places in the land. The Conventicle Act ordained "that all persons, above sixteen, convicted of attending a religious service in any other form than that prescribed by the Anglican Church, five more than the household being present, became liable to punishment—three months in prison for the first offence, six for the second, and seven years' transportation for the third." While this venomous act affected equally Roman Catholics and Dissenters, yet it was felt more severely by the Quakers, because they deemed it their duty to assemble openly, and to set at defiance the law of man. Neither was the persecution of short duration; for while the Church authorities at Witney seem to have been charitably disposed, the oppression of these Dissenters in many other places in the land did not cease till the Revolution of 1688. In justice to the Church of England it must be stated that the Conventicle Act, and others of a like nature, were the work of Parliament, because at that period dissent was looked upon as a political danger. The Quakers, as is well known, adopted a policy of non-resistance. No less than 2,500 of them were in prison at one time, and their wives and children

left at home were subject to the plunder and insult of the King's officers. It is said that Archbishop Sancroft, when appealed to with regard to the matter, made the remark that "it required crooked timber to build a ship."

The first minute book of the Witney Quakers commences with a record of a monthly meeting, held at "Northly, 13 of xth (Decr.) 1675." It is a small book, $6\frac{1}{2}$ by 4 inches, solidly bound in leather, with the remains of four thongs, to fasten it together. The first monthly meeting, held at Witney, opens with the following statement :—

"At ye monthly meeting at Wittney, ye 8th of ye 11th month, 1676, Walter, the son of John Turner, of Black Borton, bound unto William Surgood, of Drayton, narrow weaver, and the mony beinge six pounds then payd unto him. Witness his hand."

Several signatures are annexed to this, amongst others that of John Hart, previously mentioned.

The following curious entry occurs in connection with a meeting held "ye 11th day of ye 6th month. 1679."

"Elizabeth, ye wife of Drue Steward, presented a paper to ye meeting concerning a vision which she saw, concerning Friends, that they should not suffer any oath to be taken concerning burying their dead, and upon perusal and consideration thereof Friends of ye monthly meeting do unanimously agree with it, and recomend it to ye consideration of Friends at ye Quarterly meeting."

The oath, referred to above, was that which was required to be taken by the nearest surviving relative of a deceased person with regard to the burial of the latter in a woollen shroud, as ordained by a law, passed in the reign of Charles II, with the object of stimulating the woollen manufacture. In the Register of Deaths for Witney, there appears, after the entry of decease, "received certificate that was buried in burying clothes of sheep's wool only." It may be remarked that the entries with respect to burial in a woollen shroud extend over a long period of years. It is probable that this law was enacted more rigorously at Witney than in many other places, on account of its connection with the staple industry of the town. This law was very unpopular, as is evident from Pope's lines in one of his moral essays, where he represents Nance Oldfield, the actress, under the name of Narcissa, as saying:—

"Odious in woollen, 'twould a saint provoke
Were the last words that poor Narcissa spoke,
No! Let a charming chintz of Brussels lace
Wrap my cold limbs and shade my lifeless face;
One would not sure be frightful when one's dead.
And, Betty, give this cheek a little red."

The statute was repealed by 54, George III, c. 108. The law was sometimes evaded in an ingenious way. Mr. J. E. Bayley, of Stratford, near Manchester, has stated that during the time that the Act was in force corpses were sometimes covered simply with hay and flowers, a notification of which is sometimes found in parish registers. He adds: "The materials

are hereabouts called strewings. I find in the register of an adjoining parish: "Buryed in sweet flowers only." (*Ch. Folk-Lore.*) In other cases it is said that the bodies were "not wound or buried saving only in sweet flowers and hay." Affidavits were made to that effect.

The following shows how strict was the rule of the Friends in matters which would now be regarded as of a very private nature.

"At ye meeting, ye 14th, 12 mo., 1680, giles Larner and his wife did appear, according as was required, and ye matter of difference between ym. was heard, and we do find, according to their own propositions, yt. ye matter is somewhat reconciled, and they do signifie yt. they do intend to endeavour to live unanimously together, according to their intent and purpos when they were joyned in marage. In wittnesse whereof they do hereunto put their hands.

Giles C Larner
his mark.

Ann V Larner,
her mark."

"At ye monthly meeting, 8th of ye 10th mo., 1679. It is ordered and agreed yt Friends shall provide a carage, fitt for to carry ye corps to ye burying ground," and at a meeting in 10 month, 1681, "it is agreed yt. Jo Clark shall provide harnesse, according to his discretion, to draw ye carage yt is previded to carry corps, for ye use of Friends, and to bring an account of ye charge to ye next monthly meeting."

It is evident from the above that Quakers at this period were scattered in all the towns and villages round Witney, and that something of a substantial nature was required for the purpose of conveying their dead.

Though persecution may not have attended the Friends at Witney, yet it is evident from the following entry that there were those in the town who were either too intolerant of any religious body other than that to which they may have belonged, or else that there were those who assembled to interrupt from a pure love of mischief.

"The 11th of 8 mo. 1686 John Fflexney and Daniel was ordered by ye meeting to endever to still ye reude peopel, and ceepe things in good order."

The Meeting House belonging to the Friends was purchased in 1674 as appears from the following

"Thomas Minchin bought the ould housing and ground, and have bene at great part of the charg of bulding Witney Meeting House ; wher upon friends of the Monthly meeting desiered a bill of his charges which he brought into our Monthly meeting ; and when we cast it up it appeared to be four skor and three pounds and upwards, which he treely gave to be at the servis of truth."

"And Thomas Minching, John Harris, and Silas Norton have gave up their interest they have had in Witney Meeting hous, to Michael Reynolds, Jeremiah Wearing, Samuel Wheeler, and John Hope

for that end and purpose, that it may be preserved for a meeting hous for ever."

"Also Samuel Wheeler have undertook to lay up the Righting belonging to Witny Meeting hous till friends doo see it convenient to move them."

In 1695 some intention was expressed of building a school.

"It is ordered that Silas Norton and John Hope doo acquaint friends that they bring or send the money that they are willing to give towards ye building ye Skolle hous belongin to Witney Meeting hous."

From the minutes of a business meeting in 1697 it is possible to discover the names of those who identified themselves with the cause of the Friends in Witney and the neighbourhood. They were as follows :—

John Clark	Willi Warring
Jera Wearing	Gilles Tidmarsh
Willi Right	Hewry Ffranklin
Willi Heydon	Ffran Dring
Hen Brisco	John Flexney

At the same meeting "it was ordered that Jeram Wearing should send a letter to Willi Pettifer to understand his mind concerning Gorg Weason to consider sum way how to get him oute of prison by ye late Act."

The discipline exercised by the Friends is again shown by the following entry :—

"It was ordered that Willi Wearing and Henry Brisco should goo and sell ye Widdow Wateres

goods for to pay ye said Widd depte, and bring an account to ye Monthly meeting of it, also it was ordered that John Clark and Jeremiah Wearing should goo to the Skole so often as they shall see meete to see as good order be cept; also it was ordered that Daniel Fflexney should assist Margreat Hamblin, and bring an account to ye Monthly meeting of what they have done in geating of their depts up."

Most curious is it to note how particular the Friends were with respect to marriage.

"Thomas Smith, blanket maker, sun of Thomas Smith of Heyley, carpenter, declared his intention of taking Jeane Dutton, widdow, to be his wife, and the said Jeane Dutton declared her intention of taking ye said Thomas Smith to be her husband, and he is to bring a certificate from his father to signifie his consent, and Jeremiah Wearing and John Fflexney are appointed to make inquiry conserning their clearness upon ye account of marriag, and bring an account to ye next monthly meeting."

"It is ordered that Jo Fflexney should go to the Church warder to understand a method convenient to dispose of ye money gother (gathered?) on ye briefs (briefs) and give an account to ye next Monthly meeting."

An account of "Briefs" may be found in the chapter on Ecclesiastical Witney; it would appear from the above entry that Nonconformists were expected to contribute to these "relics of Popery"

as well as Church people, and having regard to the abuses and the jobbery, with respect to them, this is by no means surprising.

In 1717 the original Quakers' School seems to have expanded and instead of occasional voluntary teachers from among the Friends the design of having a settled Master arose.

"It is agreed upon by this meeting that Thomas Nichols write to the young man as is purposed for a Schoolmaster after the Purpossals as following:—

1st. That we have a very good school house with tables, seats, and desk for the Master, which he may have rent free.

2nd. That we can propose six boarders at ten pounds a year for boarding and schooling, and if he is not willing to keep a boarding school, friends of the towne are willing to take ye children till he shall be qualified for the boarding of them his self. Lastly abought twelve, weekly, Friends' children for scholars at five shillings per quarter, besides Young Woman that may be willing to improve their learning."

Whether this was altogether a lucrative post as things go now, is no concern of ours. The young man accepted the post. His name was Nicholas Marshall, and he was an ancestor of J. Marshall Allbright, of Charlbury. This school flourished till 1787, when it appears to have been given up.

"1718. This meeting having taken into consideration the case of the duty on malt, do agree in judgment that the pressing of corn, either in

the cistern or couch, which is by the Government esteemed as a fraud, should not be practiced by any professing truth."

It is somewhat difficult to understand what was meant by the above declaration, if it was intended to convey that it was wrong to try to obtain all the nutriment from the barley, then the ideas which at that time prevailed, and those that we now entertain, are very different.

These few entries are all that prove interesting respecting those who may be regarded as the first Nonconformists of Witney. The Quakers now in Witney, as in many of the adjacent towns, are by no means so numerous as formerly, but however, one may dissent from the particular doctrine that they entertained, it is impossible to read of their firm discipline, of their sympathy with what was right and just, without admiring the qualities which they displayed when England was not so free as she is now.

THE INDEPENDENTS.

It is uncertain when the Independents or Congregationalists first formed themselves into a body at Witney. As may be seen by referring to the Chapter on Ecclesiastical Witney, two lecturers at least, laboured here during the time of the Commonwealth and there can be no question at all that, though the re-establishment of the Monarchy restored the Church of England to its former position in the land, and though there were many of the Puritans even who were not sorry to see a King on

the throne again, yet, in the matter of religion, their ideas remained the same as before. The persecution which attended many of the clergy in the time of Cromwell has been referred to previously ; the time came, however, at the Restoration, when Episcopacy was in the ascendant, and then ensued persecution only, perhaps, more severe than had taken place previously.

Witney dissenters, no doubt, met in secret, fearful of the powers that were, and performed the rites of their simple faith, but it was at their peril. Their pastors had in many instances to hide themselves ; they were fined and imprisoned. That the Witney Congregationalists were oppressed during this period there is little doubt, though no records remain, but we shall probably not be wrong if we imagine them suffering, as did their brethren in other parts of the land, from such measures as the Conventicle Act, and the Five Mile Act. By the first of these, as we have seen, all Meetings for religious exercises in which more than five persons besides the members of the family were assembled, were declared seditious ; the effect of the second was to prevent the clergy, who had been turned out of their livings for Nonconformity, from being seen within five miles of any city, corporate town or borough, sending members to Parliament. And although the latter did not affect Witney, so far as the man who had been their own Rector was concerned, yet it prevented those coming to the town who would have been willing to administer to persons who were of the "Congregational way" in Witney. A story there is, connected with these times

of persecution, which must find a place here, though it is only fair to say, that true as it appears to be, so far as the main statements are concerned, yet its authenticity with regard to all the details appears to rest on very uncertain testimony. A certain minister, of the name of Gunn, so the story runs, who resided in Witney during the times of persecutions, was obliged to go to Eynsham for some reason connected with the battle then raging between Church and Dissent. Here he seems to have been punished in some way or other, though in what particular manner is not known, but the whole affair made so great an impression on the poor man's mind that in a weak moment he drowned himself in that part of Emm's dyke which is known to this day as "Gunn's Hole." This gentleman was connected with the Congregational body, the members of which probably assembled, in the latter part of the 17th century in some cottage or unfrequented place, where they thought they would be safe from molestation.

The first Chapel in Meeting House Lane appears to have been erected in the year 1712, by the Rev. Samuel Mather, son of Dr. Increase or Cotton Mather, and brother of Dr. Cotton Mather, the latter of whom fought a good fight when religious intolerance was at its height. The Rev. Samuel Mather was united in marriage to a Miss Townsend, who came of the family that lived at Staple Hall for so long a time. He was for some time Pastor of the Chapel. It seems curious to us, who live in these latter days, to

hear that his remains were buried in the Church of Witney ; and now, or till within the last fifty years, there was a plain stone with a short inscription, which marked the place of this interment. The position of early Nonconformists is not thoroughly understood now. It is true they were separated from the Established Church on one or two points which related mainly to Church Government, but their forefathers had worshipped through long generations in communion with that Church ; their departed dead had in many instances found last resting places in the Churches themselves, or in the burying grounds in connection with them. So although none were stronger than they in objecting to those matters on which they thought the Church was wrong, yet they could not shake off old ties altogether, and no doubt Mr. Mather, as did many early Nonconformist ministers, attended service regularly in the Parish Church, and afterwards conducted a service, perhaps more to his mind, in the Chapel of which he was the Minister.

The attitude which was adopted in times past by Independents is shown in the following extract from the *Gentleman's Magazine* of October, 1736. In an account given of Thomas Wright, citizen of London, who died aged 61 : "Though an Independent and a member of Mr. Howe's congregation, he was a strict monthly communicant of the Church of England."

Amongst the earliest friends of the Congregational body in Witney, was a family of the name of

Witts, several of whom lie interred in the old Chapel, under the pew which they were in the habit of occupying. Although there can be but little doubt that the "interest" as it was called, was founded by those who thought as Cromwell, and others with him, yet it would appear to have gone, at various times, through considerable vicissitudes. More than once has the Chapel been closed for a considerable period, owing to various causes, and for some time it appears that it was allied to the Baptist body, several of the ministers declaring themselves to belong to the latter persuasion.

It was the Rev. Thomas Taylor who first began to make any records of the doings of the Independents at Witney. The book in which he kept the records referred to, is prefaced in clearer handwriting than is usually to be met with now. "A regular Account of the Transactions of the Church of Christ meeting at Witney, in the County of Oxford, in Congregational order, from March 19th, 1806."

A very great deal of the space in this book is occupied with matters, such as letters with regard to the approving of new ministers, the statements of those who gave their experiences before being admitted into the body, and others not of much note to anyone now, and perhaps the first announcement which will be thought of interest, is the following :—

"1827. May 31st. The Revd. Rowland Hill of London, preached here by appointment, on his way to Wotten-under-Edge,—an overflowing congregation."

It was at this period that the Witney Independents became numerous and influential—so much was this the case that it was thought necessary to procure a larger place for worship. It was fortunate for this body that a native of Witney, to whom reference has been made before—Mr. William Townsend—was also of the “Congregational way.” This gentleman generously offered to build a Chapel at his own expense, provided the members themselves would purchase a site in a suitable position. In the spring of 1827, premises consisting of two dwelling houses, gardens, and a good orchard, surrounded with willow trees, were purchased for £700. The foundation stone of the new building was laid on the 4th of March, 1828, by Miss Townsend, and soon a new and handsome edifice was erected at a cost of £1,000.

Soon after the period when the Chapel was completed there is the following entry:—

“On Saturday, March 10th, 1832, died William Townsend, Esq., who built the Chapel. His death was sudden, but his end was peaceful. He was buried in the vault, which he had prepared for himself, on Tuesday, March 20th, and his funeral sermon was preached the next evening (21st) from Luke xii, 40, by me,

R. Taylor.”

Of the strict discipline which prevailed in former days, when the Society was in the height of its prosperity, the following entry will afford an example:—

“Mr. was suspended by ye Church for one Sabbath for attending ye Theatre.”

The following imperfect list of the ministers who have presided over the spiritual wants of the Members of this religious body, has been compiled with some difficulty from the old Chapel Book:—

— Mather		N. Hellings.
— Blake	1829	R. Taylor.
	1834	Robert Tozer
— Ward	1853	H. Perfect.
	1856	T. Wallace
— Proctor	1858	David Bell, A.M.
— Blake	1864	G. Bulmer.
— Wills	1870	J. Brantom
	1875	L. Jones.
— Stumphouse	1877	B. Sackett.
— Condor	1881	G. Brownjohn.
— Noble	1886	Till present time.
— Evans		Rev. J. Brantom.

1806 Thomas Taylor

1813 James Higgs

THE WESLEYAN METHODISTS.

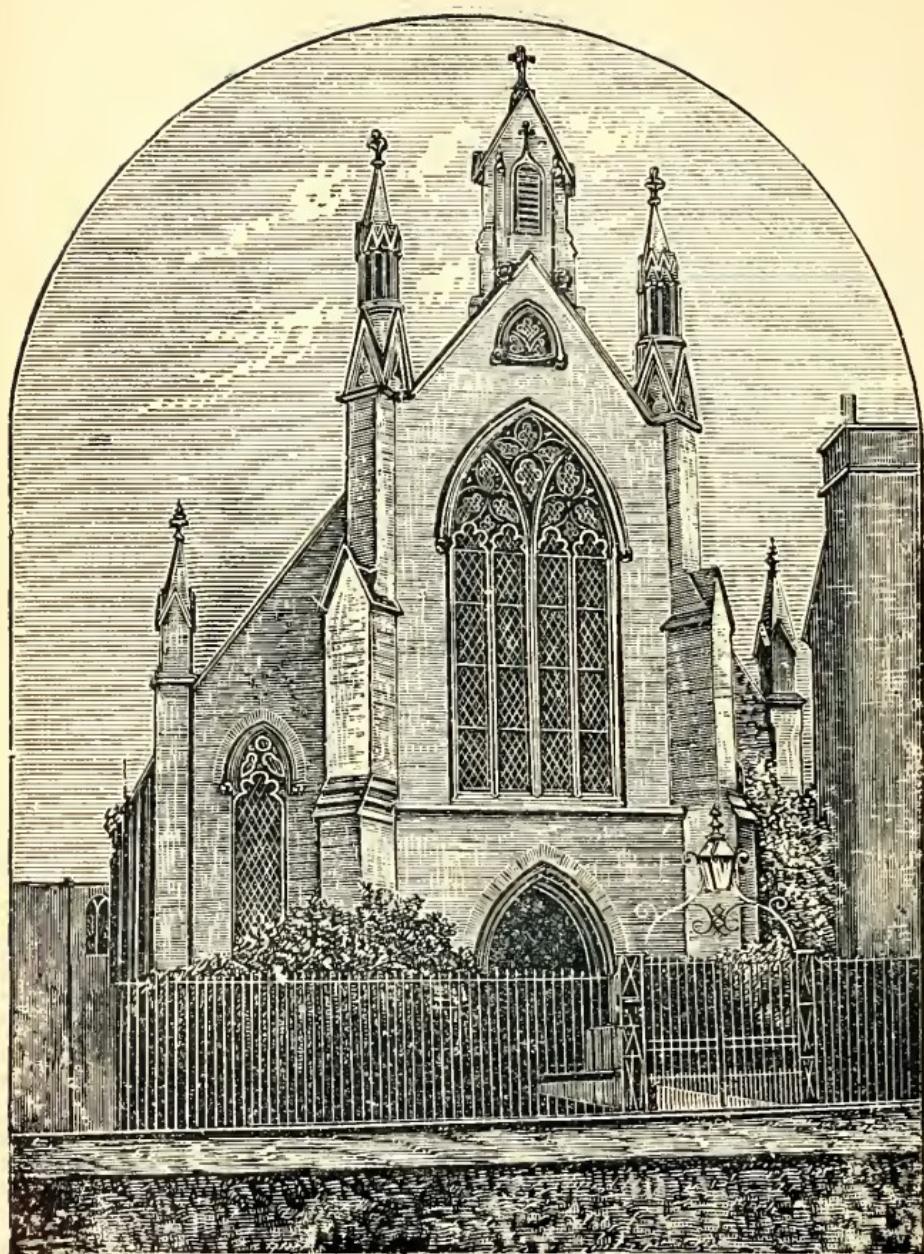
The Wesleyan Methodists in this town seem to have come into existence at an early period in the history of that religious body. The original Chapel—called in its first days, “The Methodist Meeting House,”—stood on the site now occupied by class rooms. It had been at one time a large weaving shop, but the growth of the Wesleyans, owing to a number of favourable circumstances, was so rapid that it necessitated the purchase of property adjoining, on which more commodious buildings were erected from time to time. The first Chapel

was built in 1801, principally through the exertions of Mr. Jeremiah Biggers, who is said to have been one of the best men the town ever produced. The present handsome edifice facing the High Street, was erected in 1850. Witney was, of all places in England, just such a one as Wesley esteemed it to be his particular mission to endeavour to influence. The Church of England in the town was in a most deplorable condition, the Rectors for some time had been non-resident, and while drawing the rich revenues which then pertained to their office, they seem to have been content with visiting the place, if at all, only about once a year. The two Freinds were the Rectors from 1711 to 1771, and though both these men were eminent in various ways, they do not appear to have proved themselves, in any degree, suitable for occupying the post of parochial clergymen. The Church was, at this period, asleep, and in the worst state in its career of which History makes mention. Little wonder that many, having the comforts of religion almost withheld from them by the Church of England, proceeded in other ways to get that peace for which they hungered. Fortunately for them a man was sent who did more than any of the century to breathe an earnest life into the religion of the people. John Wesley, an earnest student, and Fellow of Lincoln College, in the University of Oxford, not more than twelve miles away, had become so deeply impressed by reading two books, *De Imitatione Christi*, and Bishop Jeremy Taylor's *Holy Living*

and Holy Dying, that he gathered a faithful few in his college rooms for worship.

Wesley and his friends were, at first, a small obscure party ; no doubt, much laughed at, and misunderstood at the time, but they were instruments of immense good, and their influence became a great power throughout the country. Among them was a poor servitor, named Whitefield, then unknown, but destined before long to become one of the most famous of English preachers. These were early days, before any thought of making all the world his parish had been formed in Wesley's mind ; some practical parish work had to be attempted, too, before any religious movement on a large scale could be commenced. The time was not far distant, however, when Wesley became deeply impressed with the want of Spiritual Life in the Church, and he longed to do what he could to instill religious sentiments into the mass of the people. When he had become sadly conscious of the idleness, and of the dissolute lives led by many of the Clergy, he resolved to make it his habit to ride throughout the land, attacking the evils which shattered the usefulness of the Church, writing in short periods of rest and quiet, with the powerful help of his more poetical brother, Charles, those glorious hymns, which now, as much as ever, are the admiration of the English speaking race.

We do not know who, imbued with a desire for the changes for which Wesley was working, first began to form the Methodist body in Witney.



FROM A PHOTO

BY WILKINSON, 1885.

WESLEYAN CHAPEL, WITNEY.

What we do know is that the great religious Reformer visited the town in 1764, and that then there were a few who had met for prayer in a house for some little time.

On Tuesday, January 17th., of the year named, Wesley set out from High Wycombe to pay a visit to Witney. It was probably not his first visit to the place. He had been curate for some little period at Southleigh, a village not three miles away, and it seems only reasonable to suppose that he came to Witney more than once during this time. But here, we will let the Great Missioner tell the story of his visit in 1764, in his own words.

"Between 12 and 1 we crost Eynsham Ferry. "The water was like a sea on both sides, I asked "the ferry-man, "Can we ride the causeway?" He "said, "Yes, if you keep in the middle." But this "was the difficulty, as the whole causeway was "covered with water to a considerable depth, and "this in many places ran over the causeway with "the swiftness and violence of a sluice. Once my "mare lost both her fore feet, but she gave a spring "and recovered the causeway, otherwise we must "have taken a swim, for the water on either side "was 10 or 12 feet deep. However, after one or "two plunges more, we got through, and came safe "to Witney. The congregation in the evening, as "well as next day, was both large and deeply attentive. "This is such a people as I have not seen; so "remarkably diligent in business, and at the same

"time of so quiet a spirit, and so calm and civil
"in their behaviour."

Exceedingly high praise from a man, who was not only a particularly keen judge of men and things, but who was also not in the habit, generally speaking, of lauding anyone more than the circumstances warranted.

"1765. January Monday 7th. In the evening I preached at High Wycombe, and on Tuesday 8, at Witney. The congregation here, though of so late standing, may be a pattern to all England. When the service was ended, no one spoke, either in the evenings or mornings. All went silently out of the House and yard. Nay, when I followed a large part of them, I did not hear any open their lips till they came to their own houses."

It will be observed that Wesley does not in any way seek to magnify the kind of building in which the Methodists were in the habit of meeting. It was indeed, a house over which was the weaving shed, to which allusion has been made before.

"1766. Mon. 27th. I rode to Wycombe. In the evening I preached at Witney, (where a little company stand fast together) and thrice the next day endeavouring to lay "line upon line, precept upon precept."

"1767. August Wednesday 26th. I rode to Ipston Hall near Stoken Church, and preached about 10 o'clock, and in the evening at Witney. The next evening I preached on Woodgreen, near the town, to a large congregation, on 'Seek ye the

Lord while He may be found, call upon him while He is near.' Scarcely any were light or inattentive. Surely some will bring forth fruit unto perfection."

Open air preaching was one of the great causes of the success of Wesley's mission. This was, at that time, almost a novel proceeding, though some of the greatest of preachers had, before this, achieved renown by preaching to earnest crowds on the Green in front of St. Paul's Cathedral.

"1768. November Monday 7th. I set out for Oxfordshire, preached in Wycombe in the evening, and on Tuesday and Wednesday, at Witney."

"1769. October 18th. Thence (from Oxford) we went into Witney, where we have now a large and commodious House. It was well filled in the evening (and who ever else did) I found it good to be there, especially at the meeting of the Society. The Spirit of Glory and of Christ, was among them.

"I had designed to spend another day here. But two of our friends, who were come on purpose from Broad-Marston, importuned me to go together. So I set out with them on Thursday, and came to Broad-Marston in the afternoon.

"1770. October Monday 15th. I set out for Oxfordshire."

"1770 October Tuesday 16th. I preached at Witney, in the new House, and again on Thursday morning. After service many crowded with me into the House. I spent some time with them in prayer; it was a happy opportunity, and many prayed God for the consolation they received."

"1771. October Tuesday 15th. I went on to Witney. I am surprised at the plainness and artlessness of this people. Who would imagine that they lived within 10, yea or 50 miles of Oxford?"

"Wednesday 16th. I preached at South Lye. Here it was that I preached my first sermon, six and forty years ago. (1725). One man was in my present audience who heard it. Most of the rest are gone to their long home. After preaching at Witney, in the evening, I met the believers apart, and was greatly refreshed among them. So simple a people I scarce ever saw. They did "open the window in their breast ;" and it was easy to discern that God was there, filling them "with peace and joy in believing."

"1772. October Monday 19th. I began my tour into Oxfordshire."

"Tuesday 20th. In the evening I preached at Witney, to a crowded congregation, and at present one of the liveliest in the kingdom ; afterwards I met the Society much alive to God, and growing both in grace and number."

"Wednesday 21st. I continued freely with some of the most amiable Christians I know. In the morning I met the select society, one and twenty in number, all (it seemed) or all but one, rejoicing in the pure love of God. It is no wonder if the influence of these should extend to the whole society, or even the whole town."

"Thursday 22nd. I found another society at High Wycombe, almost as earnest as that of Witney."

“ Thursday 15th. I went on to Witney, and had the satisfaction to find that the work of God was still increasing. In the evening I preached at the East end of the town, to a numerous and attentive congregation. In the morning I met the select society, full of faith and love ; although the greater part of them are young, some little more than children. At six I preached at the West End of the town, near Miss Bolton’s door. After preaching I had a pleasant ride to Wheatley, and then to London.”

“ Wednesday 19th. I rode to Witney, and found more life than I expected, both in the congregation, and in the society.”

“ Sunday 15th. About 8 I preached at Witney. I admired the seriousness and decency of the congregation at Church.”

“ I preached at 5, on ‘Thou shalt love thy neighbour as thyself,’ a word that is sufficient to convince all mankind of sin. In meeting the select society, I was much comforted to find so few of them losing ground, and far the greater part still witnessing that ‘The Blood of Christ cleanseth from all sin.’ ”

It would appear from the above extract that Wesley, on this occasion, attended service at St. Mary’s Church. Wesley also paid a visit to Witney in February 1777.

“ July 2nd. 1777. In the afternoon I went to Witney, and the evening being fair and mild, preached on Woodgreen, to a far larger congregation than

the House could have contained. I spent the rest of the evening with a few of the excellent ones of the earth. I was ready to say "It is good for me to be here." "No." "Go thou and preach the Gospel."

Wesley also paid a flying visit to Witney in September of the same year.

"Thursday, 15th. I preached at Witney. Since Nancy B. has been detained here the Work of God has greatly revived. Mysterious Providence! That one capable of being so useful should be thus shut up in a corner!"

Nancy B., mentioned above, was a Miss Bolton, who afterwards became Mrs. Conybeare.

"1779. August 9th. In the evening I preached at Oxford; the next at Witney."

"1782. Oct. Wednesday 16th. I preached at Witney, one of the liveliest places in the Circuit, where I always find my own soul refreshed."

"July, 1783. Wednesday 16th. I went on to Witney. There were uncommon thunder and lightning here last Thursday, but nothing to that which were here on Friday night. About ten the storm was just over the town; and both the bursts of thunder and lightning, or rather the sheets of flame, were without intermission. Those that were asleep in the town were awaked, and many thought that the day of judgment was come. Men, women, and children flocked out of their houses and kneeled down together in the streets. With the flame the Grace of God came down also in a manner never

"known before; and as the impression was general, "so it was lasting; it did not pass away with the "storm, but the spirit of seriousness, with that of "grace and supplication, continued. A prayer "meeting, being appointed on Saturday evening, the "people flocked together, so that the preaching house "was more than filled; and many were constrained "to stand about the doors and windows. On Sunday "morning, before the usual time for service, the "Church was quite filled. Such a sight was never "seen in that Church before. The Rector himself "was greatly moved, and delivered a pressing close "sermon with uncommon earnestness."

"When I came on Wednesday, the same seriousness remained on the generality of the people. I preached in the evening at Wood Green, where a multitude flocked together, on the Son of Man coming in His Glory. The word fell heavy upon them, and many of their hearts were as melting wax."

"Thursday, 17th. At five they were still so eager to hear, that the preaching house would not even contain the congregation. After preaching, four-and-thirty persons desired admission into the Society; everyone of whom was (for the present, at least) under very serious impressions, and most of them, there is a reason to hope, will bring forth fruit with patience."

With reference to the storm which occurred before Wesley arrived at Witney, which he mentions, the following letter to Wesley, from Richard Rodda, is of interest:—

"On the 29th of last June (1783) I preached on Wood Green, at the end of Witney, in Oxfordshire. While I was preaching, something uncommon impelled me to say, 'My dear friends, take notice of what I am going to say:—before this day month, you will hear and see something very uncommon,' but I knew not why I said so. On Wednesday, the 2nd July, it began to thunder and lighten in a very dreadful manner. The people cried out that I had prophesied the world was to be at an end, and they thought it was now fulfilling. Two persons were struck dead by the lightning. Numbers had their sins set in order before them; saw the necessity of a Saviour; and some groaned after Him."

"On the 10th, the Lord thundered from Heaven and sent forth His lightnings a second time. On the 11th it was more dreadful than it had been before. Now, indeed, the most stubborn heart trembled and bowed before the Lord. The numbers that flocked both to the Church and Meeting were incredible, and there was such an awakening among them as the oldest man living could not remember, in consequence whereof the next time I came there I added fifty new members to our Society."

Mr. Rodda was one of those travelling preachers who occupied so important a part in Wesley's scheme for the conversion of England. Not long ago, there were those living who had conversed with many that were eye witnesses of the awful visitation, described above, and not one of them alluded to it, but with a kind of shudder. Three thousand

people were present at the preaching of this sermon, and the solemn silence and attention of the vast multitude created as great an impression as the storm itself. A great many of those who joined Mr. Wesley's Society at this time were called, in consequence, "The Thunder and Lightning Methodists."

Wesley, in a letter to Miss Ritchie, whom he addresses "My Dear Betsey," says, "I do not remember any storm which travelled so far as that of the 10th. It has been in almost all parts of England, but especially at Witney, near Oxford. The next night they had a far greater, which seemed to cover the whole town for four hours, with almost one uninterrupted blaze; and it has made such an impression on high and low, rich and poor, as had not been known in the memory of man."

A gentleman of Gloucester, who was at Witney when the storm fell there, describes the scene as the most dismal he ever beheld. Not only were a man and woman killed by the lightning, but several people, hay-making in the fields near the town, were struck senseless; by bleeding, and other applications, they were recovered.

The year 1783 was a dreadful one throughout the world, so far as atmospherical phenomena were concerned. Cowper in his house at Olney was writing "The Task," and noting the extraordinary climatic conditions in the following lines:—

"Is it a time to wrangle when the props
And pillars of our planet seem to fail;
And nature with a dim and sickly eye
To wait the close of all?"

A dry fog appeared, inexplicable though harmless. The misty veil continued nearly a month, and the sun appeared red through it. Cowper says, "The sun continues to rise and set without his rays, and hardly shines at noon, even in a cloudless sky, and the moon appears a dull red." Butcher's meat could hardly be kept a single day, and wasps came in myriads. In August, a brilliant meteor appeared, travelling through space with immense velocity. And yet, with all these unusual climatic conditions, the fog did not affect vegetation in the least, and there was a good harvest.

To return to Wesley's Journal :—

"Septr. Wed., 15th. I came to Witney. The flame, which was kindled here by that providential storm of thunder and lightning, is not extinguished ; but has continued ever since, with no discernible intermission. The preaching-house is still too small for the congregation."

"1784. Oct., Thursday, 21st. I preached at Witney on 'As thou hast believed, so be it done unto thee.' We had a large congregation at five in the morning ; at twelve I met the children, and was pleased to find that the impression which was made on them by the storm last year is not yet worn out, and the whole Society—still double to what it was—appears to be much in earnest."

"After preaching in the evening I met the select society, and found many of them who for several years have lost nothing of what they had received, but do still love God with all their heart,

and in consequence rejoice evermore, pray without ceasing, and in everything give thanks."

"1785. October, Monday 10th. I preached in the evening at Witney, where the power of God used to be eminently present. In all this circuit the work of God appears both to widen and to deepen."

"1787. October, Monday 15th. I began a little tour through Oxfordshire."

"Thursday 16th. The house at Witney would nothing near contain the people in the evening. It was well filled at 5 on Wednesday morning. I dearly love this people, they are so simple of heart and so much alive to God. After dinner we returned to Oxford."

"1788. November, Tuesday 14th. I preached at Witney, which I generally find a very comfortable place. I think much of the impression which was made on the people here at the time of the great storm remains still."

"1789. November, Tuesday 27th. I went to Witney. Here I found a lively people, many of whom were hungering and thirsting after righteousness. Of what use to a whole community may one person be, even a woman, (Mrs. Conybeare is here again referred to) that is full of faith and love! The Lord strengthen thy heart, and fully prepare thee for every good word and work."

While, as I have stated, it is quite certain that John Wesley had no intention to separate from the Church, it is not less true that after his death,

his followers were obliged, by the unwise action of the authorities of the Church, to form a separate Society. Indeed, there is, perhaps, no more unwise incident, which can be recorded in the History of the English Church, than the particular action which was taken with regard to the Wesleyan body.

The handsome and commodious block of buildings, standing in the High Street, has been considerably altered and enlarged during the last 10 years, some £7,000 having been spent in this way, and in clearing a debt that had remained on the premises for some years. In 1884 the handsome block of School buildings was erected, the architect being Mr. Edward Early Hollis, of London, who unfortunately did not live to see the completion of his work. In 1889 the Chapel was much improved, being re-seated throughout with pitch-pine, and the roof also lined with the same wood. The organ was at the same time enlarged, and rebuilt by Mr. Martin, of Oxford, and the Organ Chamber and choir seats lowered, and brought further out into the Chapel. And then, in 1893, the two houses that partly hid the buildings from view were pulled down, a caretaker's cottage erected on the South side of the property, and a handsome railing of 100 feet in length, put along the frontage.

The premises comprise, in addition to the Chapel, a vestry, four class rooms, and a commodious committee room, for the use of all purposes connected with the Church. Then there are extensive Day School premises, consisting of a large main room,

three class rooms, with galleries in each, an infant room, with class room attached, and a Master's room. Over all these is the Sunday School rooms, comprising a large and fine hall, measuring 62 feet 6 inches by 42 feet 6 inches, and three separate class rooms. The whole block, containing entirely distinct rooms for Church purposes, Sunday School work, and for Day School work, is a credit to the Wesleyan Church of Witney, and an ornament to the town.

METHODIST PREACHERS WHO HAVE BEEN STATIONED
IN THE WITNEY CIRCUIT.

Witney, on the first introduction of Methodism here, was connected with what was called the Oxfordshire Circuit. At the Conference of 1795, Newbury Circuit was formed, and Witney was associated with that circuit, but eight years after, in 1803, Witney was made into a separate circuit. Again in 1813, Chipping Norton circuit was formed out of Witney. Below we give a list of the ministers stationed here, from the time of its being made a distinct circuit, in the year 1803 :—

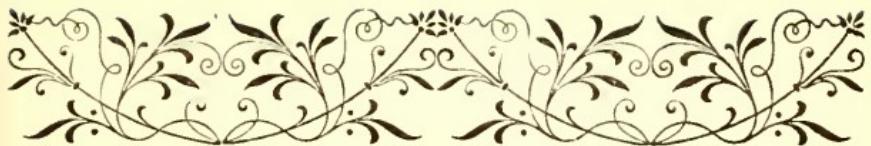
1803. Joseph Robbins, Robert Melson.
1804. Joseph Robbins, Thomas Edman.
1805. Thomas Blanshard, Joseph Wilson.
1806. Thomas Blanshard, Josiah Walker.
1807. Robert Wheeler, Lewis Andrews.
1808. Robert Wheeler, Frederick Calder.
1809. Caleb Simmons, John Bedford.
1810. Caleb Simmons, One to be sent.
1811. Joshua Fielden, William Toogood.

-
1812. James Sydserff, William Mowat.
1813-1814. James Bate.
1815. John Sydserff, William Langridge.
1816. John Sydserff, Arthur Jewett.
1817. Joseph Gostick, John Jackson.
1818. Joseph Gostick, Isaac Phenix.
1819. Isaac Phenix, Samuel Trueman.
1820. David Deakin, Thomas Dodd.
1821. John Squarebridge, John W. Button.
1822. John Squarebridge, John Langstone.
1823. Owen Rees, Thomas Cocking.
1824. Owen Rees, Jonathan J. Bates.
1825. Corbett Cooke, William Hunt.
1826. Corbett Cooke, John Henley.
1827. Corbett Cooke, John Henley, John T. Barr.
1828. Joseph Sanders, James Cooke, James Vowles.
1829. Joseph Sanders, Francis Burgess, William Wilson.
1830. Joseph Sanders, John Langstone, Edward Hanscombe.
1831-1832. Wm. Brocklehurst, Jas. Loutit.
1833. Benjamin Andrews, Joseph Wilson.
1834. Benjamin Andrews, Thomas Robinson.
1835-1836. John Geden, Thomas Robinson.
1837. John Geden, Joseph Hollis.
1838-1839. Joseph Hollis, William Burnett.
1840-1841. John Roberts, Samuel H. Wardley.
1842. James Allen (a), Samuel H. Wardley.
1843. James Allen (a), John Griffith.
1844. William Sharpe, John Griffith.
1845. William Sharpe, John Anderson.

1846. William Sharpe, John D. Julian.
1847-1848. Charles Westlake, John D. Julian.
1849. Charles Westlake, John Dowty.
1850-1851. Peter C. Horton, John Dowty.
1852. Peter C. Horton, Joseph Portrey.
1853. James Mayer, Joseph Portrey.
1854-1855. James Mayer, George Kevern.
1856. Hugh Jones (a), George Kevern.
1857. Hugh Jones, (a), Christopher Ridler.
1858. Robert Sherwell, Christopher Ridler.
1859-1860. Robert Sherwell, John Bond.
1861-1862. Benjamin John, Samuel M'Aulay.
1863-1865. Richard Ray, Richard Hardy.
1866-1868. John Knowles, Samuel Naish.
1869-1871. William Brailey, Caleb Foster.
1872-1873. Henry Hine, James P. Dunn.
1874. Henry Hine, Thomas Nicholson.
1875-1876. Richard Allen (b), Thomas Nicholson.
1877. Richard Allen (b), H. Owen Rattenbury.
1878-1879. Jabez Ingham, H. Owen Rattenbury.
1880. Jabez Ingham, Thomas Evans.
1881-1882. Alexander F. Fogwell, Thomas Evans.
1883. Alexander F. Fogwell, William H. Walker
1884-1885. William H. Walker, Edward R.
Gibbens.
1886. Wm. G. Dicken, Edward Gibbens.
1887-1888. Wm. G. Dicken, Edmund Potts.
1889. J. S. Bellman, Edmund Potts.
1890-1891. J. S. Bellman, W. H. Price.
1892. W. H. Price, W. Brown.
1893-1894. T. Hackett, W. Brown.

Other places of Worship in the town are:—The Primitive Methodist Chapel, in Corn Street; this was built in 1870, and stands in front of the old Chapel, built in 1843, and now used as a schoolroom. The Rev. T. Phelps is the present minister. The Brethren have a room at the Corn Exchange, where they conduct public worship; and then there is a local corps of the Salvation Army, with a Barracks at West End.





CHAPTER VIII.

Witney in times of War and Tumult.

THE various conflicts, which disturbed the country so much before the 15th century, from time to time, do not appear to have occasioned Witney or the neighbourhood very much anxiety. Possibly, when Matilda was besieged in Oxford, by Stephen, Witney, from being so near, might see something of the strife then proceeding, though this is pure conjecture.

Various social changes, of a more or less important nature, were, in the latter part of the 16th century, always going on. The people of England, from a state of comparative prosperity which prevailed from the Peasants' Revolution in 1381, to the period mentioned, had fallen into as deplorable a condition as can be imagined. There were many causes which led to this unhappy result. First in order must be mentioned the ruinous

extravagance of Henry VIII. Not only did a good deal of the money, which he ground from his oppressed people, go to subsidise other monarchs on the continent, but his own personal expenses in connection with his household establishments, were simply enormous. The money which he received on account of the dissolution of the monasteries was soon wasted—gambled away by the King and his satellites ; and, although little open discontent was manifest, yet there can be no doubt that the dissolution of the monasteries was attended with the direst results to the poor, especially, throughout the length and breadth of the land. Those who had been tenants of monastic property had found the monks indulgent landlords. Their lands had been held upon what was known as the "Stock and Land Lease System," but when the monastic system was broken up the poorer tenants were ruined, and the foundations of English pauperism unfortunately laid. Amongst many of the evil practices pursued by the King was the issuing of base coin. The effect of the wicked, selfish act was not felt in his time, but later on, the English labourer had cause to be bitterly aware of it. The prices of everything rose, but, as is always the case, wages did not rise in anything like equal proportion ; and soon, as Sir Thomas More had remarked at an earlier period, "poor wretches—men, women, husbands, orphans, parents with little children—all these emigrate from their native fields without knowing where to go." Such a grave state of things which existed throughout the land could

not fail to touch Witney. At this time the peasantry throughout the whole of England were in a state of the fiercest discontent. Certain it is that towards the end of the reign of Henry VIII the people in such places as Witney, dependant in a great measure on agriculture, were, through the causes before mentioned, in a state bordering on despair. But perhaps the greatest cause of discontent, that which affected in a great measure the welfare of the people, in such places as Witney, was due to the confiscation of the Gild Lands. This had been commenced by Henry VIII, but it was not finally carried out till the reign of his son, Edward VI, by the Duke of Somerset. These gilds were of two kinds—religious and secular. Those of the former kind, which existed at Witney, may be seen by referring to the Survey, which took place in the reign of Edward VI; of the latter, so far as Witney is concerned, nothing is known, though it is almost impossible to believe that one, at least, did not exist in a place which had been famous for the manufacture of cloth during some centuries. Gilds, both religious and secular, held lands which had been acquired either by the bequests of the members, or else by purchase from the gild funds. The secular gilds were accustomed to use the revenue of these lands for purposes such as lending money without usury, to poor people, apprenticing poor children, and relieving destitute persons. It will thus be perceived that these gilds fulfilled, in some measure, the functions of the modern Benefit Societies. Now it is certain that the Religious Gilds

had been associated with superstitious uses, and some kind of reformation was urgently required with regard to them, though whether the abuses connected with them was an adequate ground for using their revenues entirely for secular purposes, may be open to very grave doubt. No one will be found who will assert that there was herein a sufficient reason, or indeed any reason at all, for suppressing the Craft Gilds, and yet this was actually done, without making the faintest distinction between Religious Gilds and Craft Gilds. Edward VI, by his adviser Protector Somerset suppressed both, because of the superstitions which existed in the former. This suppression was a terrible blow to the labourer throughout the land; for it must be remembered that the Gilds had been a help against pauperism, they had steadied the price of labour, in fact, they had in some measure, though in a much more excellent manner, done the work of our modern Trades' Unions.

Another cause of discontent, towards the end of the 16th century, was the number of enclosures continually being made. These, it is true, had been going on for centuries, though, perhaps, they were larger towards the end of the 16th century than they were formerly. It is almost certain that Witney and its neighbourhood suffered more severely from these encroachments on the land than did many parts of England, for it must be remembered that it was extensive sheep-farming which led to the great enclosures of the 16th century. Witney and its neighbourhood were, from very earl-

times, noted for the production of a very fine kind of wool ; and it is only reasonable to suppose, on this account, that more enclosures went on at Witney and the neighbourhood than in most other places. Of course, our trade in wool, in consequence of these enclosures, progressed, but the effect on the poor was disastrous in the extreme ; instead of land being required for arable husbandry, it was laid down to grass, which required comparatively little labour. Such were some of the causes which led to permanent pauperism in England, and which existed at its worst towards the end of the 16th century. Although the indigence of the English people had become established, yet no system of Poor Law Relief was instituted till the year 1601, and before this period distress of a grievous kind had existed everywhere. Continual trivial disorders were breaking out occasionally throughout the land, and the causes which led to the rising of the Oxfordshire people were those which have been mentioned.

The following are extracts from the Calendars of State Papers with reference to this matter :—

1595-97.

RISING OF PEOPLE IN OXFORDSHIRE.

“ Dec. 14th. Vincent Rankell, of Witney. Barth Steere tried to induce him to join them, saying they were no base fellows, but husbandmen, and wished him to persuade others to join, Dec. 4th, 1596.”

“ John Steere of Witney was told of the rising by his brother Barth, who said there would be 200

or 300 people, not needy, from Woodstock, Bladon, Kirtleton, &c., and they would go from one rich man's house to another, and take horses, arms, and victuals. Tried to persuade against such unlawful courses, but he said he would not always live like a slave."

"James Bradshaw, the miller's son of Hampton also asked him to join, December 5th., 1596."

"1595-1597. December 2nd., 1596.

Exam. of Thomas Horne, carpenter, of Hampton. Gay, Roger Symond's man. Barth Steere spoke of merry times shortly, for good fellows were abroad, who would have both corn and cattle. About St. Hugh's day, saw some 10 persons with pikes and swords on Enslow Hill, went thither once with Steere and others, expecting to meet men from Witney, and go to Mr. Powers, of Blechington, for corn and cattle, Steere had a pike staff and hanger, others short swords and daggers, December 17th., 1596."

"1595-1597. January 7th., 1597."

"Exam. of James Bradshaw Miller.

Bartholomew Steere first talked to him about a rising at Hampton-Poyle, in the presence of John Steere, his father, and John, his brother, when the latter said there were 100 in Witney, who would go with them to throw down enclosures &c. Barth Steere said it would never be well until the gentry were knocked down."

"Steere also said there were a 100 men who would come out of Witney, and there was a mason

who could make balls of wild-fire, and had a sling
to fling the same, whereby he could fire houses as
occasion should serve."

These extracts show the social discontent rife
in the county at the close of Elizabeth's reign.

WITNEY AND THE CIVIL WAR.

Although Witney did not take a very active part in the Civil War, there are very many circumstances which point to the fact that it was only due to a combination of fortuitous events that the place did not supply the battle ground for some of those fierce and sanguinary struggles, which during this War, were frequently taking place in the neighbourhood of Oxford. For it was to the latter place that King Charles, beaten in many battles, retired, conscious of the deep loyalty of the University town. All round Oxford, therefore, the struggle raged, and we may be sure that trivial engagements of one kind and another were of frequent occurrence at Witney, and indeed at all places in the neighbourhood. Such entries as the following extracted from the Register of Burials in Witney Church, prove this to have been the case.

"April, 1643. Captain Sparks the fifth day;

Thomas Grandger, a souldier, the 13th day;

Isabell Wynn, a souldier's wife the 21st day."

"October, 1643. A souldier the first day;

A souldier the same day;

A souldier the fifth day."

"February, 1644. A souldier ye 28th day;

November, 1644. A souldier the 2nd day."

The above entries undoubtedly show that during the progress of the Civil War, Witney took some share in the conflict ; it is, in fact, quite certain that the townspeople in those days were well accustomed to the sight of Royalist and Parliamentary soldiers, and it is also safe to conjecture that in the town, itself, there were those who were ready to throw their caps in the air, and shout for joy when the army of King Charles passed through the town, and those too, who regarded the close cropped soldiers of the Parliament as saviours of the country. It is impossible to believe otherwise when it is remembered that there were, probably even in early Puritanic times at Witney, a number who were not in sympathy with the Church o England, which meant that they were afterwards or those, who thought like them, on the sid of the Roundheads. That there were those wh sided with the ill-fated House of Stuart, admits no doubt. The following from a volume of undate Calendar State Papers, gives a list of persons wh lent money to Charles I :—

	£	s.	d.
" Five of Witney and "Burd," (Burford?)	80	10	0
Five of Bampton	163	14	0
Eleven of Witney and Lee	170	3	4

The following letter from Edward Dalton, Esq dated March 23rd, 1843, to the Rev. Thom Symons, of Eynsham, is of interest in connectio with this :—

"My family were resident freeholders at Curbridge, in the Parish of Witney, from before 1570 to 1644, when they followed the declining fortunes of King Charles, and suffered grievously at Newbury, during the above period. Their names frequently occur in the Parish Registers and Church Books, as Churchwardens, Way-Wardens, &c. In Willis's *Mitred abbeys* vol. ii. p. 188, is this entry, "A pension, paid to William Dalton, chantry priest of Witney, Oxford." The extract from the preamble to my pedigree shews three descents. James was son of Walter Dalton, of Curbridge Court, eldest son of that Walter Dalton, who was grievously wounded in the head, fighting under the royal banner at Newbury battle, where the chief of his house (Col. Thos. Dalton, who raised the Dalton regiment of norse for King Charles, as recorded in England's Bloody Tribunal) was mortally wounded, and died in Marlborough. There were slain also, in that fight, Charles Marmaduke, Edward and William Dalton, of this family. I have also hoped to find in some private or public collection, some memorial of my family, previous to their migrating from Oxfordshire. The family tradition is that the money received for the sale of Curbridge, was given into His Majesty's own hands by Walter Dalton, in a long leathern purse, on the top of the stairs at Christ Church, Oxford; the land bought in Wales, with the residue, still continues in the family. They were, at the time of the Civil Wars, for several generations, intimately connected with the Ashburhams."

In time, even Oxford became an unsafe asylum for the unfortunate Charles. The Earl of Essex and Sir William Waller were watching the city, and endeavouring to accomplish the surrender of the unhappy monarch. Charles therefore resolved to seek a safer refuge ; but to escape was a matter of considerable difficulty, for nearly the whole country around was held by the armies of the Parliament. It is true that Charles's forces occupied some of the towns and villages in the neighbourhood, as the following extract from a copy of an account of the "Earl of Essex's March from St. Albans to Oxford," shows :—

"Friday, November 1st. His Majesty, Prince Charles, and King's troop from Cirencester to Oxford that night thirty-two miles. By the way the King met the messenger from General Gerrard, that his forces, consisting of 3,000, are at hand. At this time our army was quartered at Woodstock, Witney, Burford, &c."

But when Charles, on the 3rd. June, determined to escape from the besiegers, it was, notwithstanding the presence of these troops, a matter of great difficulty. But here we will let the great historian, Clarendon, tell the story.

"All things being in order, on Monday the 3rd of June, about nine of the clock at night, the King, with the prince, and those lords and others, who were appointed to attend him, and many others of quality who were not appointed, and only thought themselves less secure if they should stay

behind, marched out of the North Port, attended by his own troop, to the place where the horse and commanded foot waited to receive them, and from thence, without any halt, marched between the two armies, and by daybreak were at Handborough, some miles beyond all their quarters. But the King rested not till the afternoon, when he found himself at Burford, and there concluded he was in no danger to be overtaken by any army that was to follow with baggage, and a train of artillery, so that he was content to refresh his men there, and supped himself, yet was not without apprehension that he might be followed by a body of the enemy's horse, and therefore about nine of the clock he continued his march from Burford over the Cotswolds, and by mid-night reached Bourton-on-the-Water, where he gave himself, and his weary troops more rest and refreshment."

The King, on this occasion, did not pass actually through the town, but took the road through Handborough, a little to the North of Witney. We have certain testimony of this from the following extract from the diary of Henry Symonds, who was in the troop of horse (part of the Royal army), commanded by Lord Bernard Stuart, younger son of the Duke of Lennox. (*Harleian M.S.S.*)

"1644, June 2nd. At one of the clock in the afternoon the King, accompanied with his troop &c., went to Woodstock and killed two bucks, and supped there. News came at ten o'clock at night that Waller was at Newbridge with all his forces,

consisting of ten thousand, and that a hundred and fifty horse were on the Oxfordshire side come over."

"We marched toward Oxford, and lay in the field by the way. Our soldiers hung lighted matches at the Mill and bridge, near Islip, to cheate Essex and so fairely left the place, the enemy shooting many times that night at the watches in vayne. We came safe to Oxford that Monday morning, brought all the King's army safe to Oxford, and that day many of our foot and horse went towards Abington with our cannon and carriages, which made Waller haste from Newbridge to Abington. At nine o'clock that night the King with all his army lay in the field at Wolvercote, marched without a cannon between Newbridge and Woodstock, and left Witney on the left-hand, so to Burford, a long street, and one Church, where the King's troope refreshed themselves at Mr. William Lenthall's house in that town, and that night marched to Bourton-super-aqua."

Waller had early intimation of His Majesty's movements, and immediately resolved to follow him, but although he overtook many of the stragglers and others, who had succumbed to the influence of Bacchus, he was a little too late to come up with the main army. At a Council held at Burford, however, it was resolved that Waller should follow the King wherever he should go, and the former not unnaturally thinking that Charles's design was to escape to the North, immediately put himself into a position to prevent this. The King becoming

aware of Waller's intention, and being also conscious of the latter's power to prevent him from getting to the North, immediately resolved to return to Oxford, and rejoin his army.

Clarendon says :—

"Now the King sent Colonel Fielding, and lest he should miscarry, two or three other messengers to the Lords of the Council, at Oxford, to let them know of his happy return, and that he meant to quarter that night at Burford, and the next at Witney, where he did expect that all his foot with their colours and cannon would meet him, which with unspeakable joy they did."

The before mentioned Henry Symonds also says :—

"Tuesday, after His Majesty had been at Church, and heard the sermon, and dyned, he marched that night to Witney—five miles; two miles short of Witney on the left hand as we came from Burford, stands Minster Lovell, an ancient howse of the Lord Lovell, worth seeing."

CHARLES I. AT WITNEY.

"At Witney, Charles stayed three days and nights at the White Hart Inn, from Tuesday 18th June to Thursday night, including June 20th (Sir E. Walker's *Carolinum in Gutch Collectanea Curiosa* Vol. ii. p. 433).

Very pleasant would it be, if we could discover how the unfortunate Monarch spent the three days in this town. Did he walk about looking with

those large mournful eyes, such as we see in his portrait by Vandyke, at the evidences of the prosperity, which seems to have prevailed in the town at this time? Did he attend Church as was his custom? These things we do not know, but we can well imagine the painful thoughts connected with his dying cause, which must at this time have been continually present to his mind. The three days passed away, and for the last time the poor King turned his back on Witney, and not many years after expiated his faults, or, as some would say, won his martyr's crown on the scaffold.

But, although the King had left Witney for ever, the townspeople had not seen the last evidences of the strife, as the following extracts from the diary of Sir W. Dugdale show :—

“ 1644. July 17th. Waller marched to Woodstock.”

“ 1644. July 19th. Waller marched from Woodstock to Witney.”

Another personage intimately connected with events, then going on, also visited the town. Restless Rupert, nephew of the King, and the dashing leader of the Royalist Cavalry, was always rushing out of Oxford, to plunder, pillage, and steal ; it was on one of these raids, only two years before, that he fell on the Parliamentary leader—John Hampden—at Chalgrove Field, and in the skirmish which followed, defeated the patriot, and caused his death. Many were the excursions of a like nature, we may be sure, which Rupert undertook between Oxford and Cirencester.

The latter place eventually fell into the hands of the Royalists, and three hundred of the townspeople, prostrating themselves at the feet of Prince Rupert, begged for mercy. The writer of the *Bibliotheca Gloucestrensis* says, however, the Royalists “stripped many of the prisoners, most of them of their inmost garments. They were all turned that night into the Church, and though many of them were wounded and weary, yet their friends were not suffered to bring them a cup of water into the Church that night, but what they thrust in at the back side of the Church, and the like cruelty, I hear, was showed unto them, when they lay in Witney Church, in their passage to Oxford. They tied all the prisoners, gentlemen, ministers, and all, in ropes, and made them all go a foote through the dirt in the streets, on the way to Oxford, which, in regard of the many horses, was up to their knees some times.”

There is no record of this desecration of Witney Church in the Churchwardens’ Account Book, but this is scarcely surprising, for it was by no means an uncommon event for the soldiers of both sides, during the Civil War, to use the Churches as prisons, and the occurrence was not unusual enough, in all probability, to demand particular notice.

The following, too, from Sir W. Dugdale’s Diary, shows that although the King had gone from Oxford, the neighbourhood was not free from strife:—

“1646. March 18th. The Earl of Lindsay went from Oxford to Winchester House. The same day

2,000 of the rebels came into Woodstock from Witney, commanded by Colonel Rainsborough."

The Civil War in process of time came to an end, and Witney, like other places, settled down to a period of rest and quiet. It is probable, though, that the town was startled on the evening of Thursday, July 17th, 1649, by the sight of a band of soldiers, commanded by a very remarkable Englishman, who passed swiftly through the place. For the mighty Oliver, fresh from his victory over the Levellers at Burford, must have gone through Witney on his way to Oxford to stay some days with the Warden of All Souls' College. Few of the townsmen, who saw this small army and its commander—even if they were aware who the latter was—thought that for years the destinies of England would be committed to his keeping; and that he would make this country feared and respected throughout Europe.

Here, too, in 1684, came that notorious candidate for infamy—Captain Dangerfield—the fabricator of a "Popish Plot." This man states in his Diary, published in 1685 under the title of his "Memoires," that he dined at the "Salutation Inn," at Witney, on the 12th of December, 1684, and spent there 3/6. Whether this villain's visit had any connection with plots similar to that one which he had previously concocted, and which has ever since been known as "The Meal Tub Plot," from the fact that he stated that incriminating papers would be found in a meal tub, there are no means of ascertaining.

JACOBITE SPIRIT AT WITNEY.

We have evidence, too, that later on the Jacobite spirit was strong at Witney. Who fostered the rebellious feeling in this part of the country is not known, though it is certain that some of the members of the Harcourt family were amongst those who were in the habit of passing their glasses over the finger bowls when the sovereign was toasted, signifying that the King, to whose health they were drinking, was over the water. Over one of the entrances to the Harcourt Mortuary Chapel, at Stanton Harcourt, the motto, "Le bon temps viendra," tells us that it exercised such influence upon some of the members of this ancient family that the motto, referring to the "good time" when "the King should enjoy his own again" found a place, for a period, under the Harcourt crest.

"1716. March 23rd. The persons lately taken into custody by the Messengers and brought from Witney, in Oxfordshire, for enlisting men for the Pretender in order to make an insurrection in that county, (against whom there seemed so positive a proof, that it was supposed an indictment of nothing less than high treason could be found against them), have been discharged. It appears to the Government to be only an inveterate malice to swear away their neighbour's lives."

The following affidavit throws some light upon the proceedings disclosed in the above quotation:—

"Benjamin Walton, of Witney, in the County of Oxford, carpenter, voluntarily maketh oath, that

"in the month of February last, Thomas Soames, a
"servant of Sir Francis Blake, sent for the deponent
"to his master's house and asked him if he knew
"anything against Thomas Carter, who was lately this
"deponent's master. This deponent told him, if he
"did, he dare not speak of it, because he owed the
"said carpenter money ; then the conversation
"ceased. That about the beginning of March last,
"a servant of George Pomfret came for this deponent
"to go to the parsonage house, in Witney aforesaid,
"where the said George Pomfret lived, and this
"deponent accordingly went to the said house and
"found, in company with the said George Pomfret,
"the said Thomas Soames, who both asked him,
"this deponent, to sit down and drink with them,
"and bid him fear nothing, for he should have
"money to pay Carter ; and then asked this deponent
"if he could be revenged on Carter, and if he knew
"anything against Mr. Johnson, Mr. Moulding, or
"Mr. Haskins, or any others that used to keep this
"deponent's master's (Carter's) company ; to which
"this deponent answered he knew nothing ; for he
"was not company for such gentlemen ; that this
"deponent and the said Pomfret and Soames fell to
"drinking, and a pen, ink, and paper were called
"for, and Mr. Pomfret dictated to Soames, who
"wrote what Mr. Pomfret said ; and after burning
"some part of what was wrote, and correcting the
"rest, Soames wrote it again on another piece of
"paper, and both Pomfret and Soames obliged the
"deponent when much in liquor, and without having

"any knowledge of the contents, to write and set "his name to the said paper; and Soames gave this "deponent forty-two shillings, and immediately went "with him and saw this deponent pay his master "(Carter) the money he owed him; and Soames, "both before and since, gave this deponent money. "B. Walton. Coram me. Tho. Gery."—(*Symona's M.S.S. Collection.*)

The state of affairs which the above affidavit indicates, existed not only at Witney, but in most places throughout the land. Nearly everywhere there were those who were yet in favour of the exiled Stuarts. The spies of George I were, however, to be found in most places, and by their aid those who were in favour of rebellion were detected. It would appear, though, judging from the above, that sometimes their eagerness was not associated with discretion, and that the arresting of innocent persons was the result.

And Witney, too, forty years after, had a small share in suppressing the insurrection of "Bonnie Prince Charlie," as the following extract, taken from the Blanket Company's minute book, shows:—

"14 Novr., 1745. Whereas it was agreed that this Company should raise 30 men for the service of His Majesty in suppressing the present unnatural rebellion, and it appearing to be agreeable to the Government to have the same paid in ready money, (to wit) one guinea for each man, it is agreed and ordered that the present master do pay the sum of thirty guineas into the hand of the proper officer,

and to take a receipt in lieu of the thirty men to serve as their quota in the Oxfordshire regiment of foot, commanded by the Right Honourable Lord Viscount Harcourt."

Much had taken place during the time which had elapsed since dull heavy-eyed Prince James had vainly attempted to acquire the throne of his fathers ; and many families, which had been remarkable for their attachment to Jacobitism, had changed their colour. A hatred of civil war, and a desire to see the nation settling down to enjoy the blessings of peace, were, doubtless, some of the causes which induced the Harcourts to fight for the House of Hanover.

ENCLOSURE RIOTS.

Once again was Witney connected with tumult. The evils, resulting from the enclosures of the 16th century, have been already referred to. These encroachments went on in the 18th century, but very much more rapidly and boldly, and they were, in very many instances, acts of robbery, pure and simple. Three hundred and thirty four thousand nine hundred and seventy four acres of land were enclosed between 1710 and 1760. It is true that beneficial results had, in some instances, followed these encroachments, but this in no way justifies the robbery. The condition of the labourers, at this time, was one of chronic misery. Wages had been steadily falling for a long time, and the cost of provisions had been at the same time rising. The small yeoman farmers had been almost extinguished,

and the old common field system, by which every farmer had possessed a small quantity of land, had come to an end. The results which followed, although in some respects beneficial, had not failed, nevertheless, to touch the agricultural labourers deeply. These were some of the causes which induced the outbreak of the peasantry around Witney in 1761. What actually took place is indicated in a private letter, written from Witney in March, 1761 :—

“Last Saturday noon, a detachment of the “Berkshire regiment, commanded by Captain Balgrave, “with the grenadiers, under Captain Andrews, “marched into the place. At twelve on Sunday “night the drum beat to arms—on intelligence being “received that a party of rioters had risen to demolish “the fences on North-Leigh Heath ; but before the “troops could reach the place, the rioters were gone. “The soldiers marched, however, about the heath “until five in the morning, and then returned “to their quarters in Witney. At two in the “afternoon on Monday, the drums beat again to “arms, and, intelligence being received that upwards “of three thousand persons were met together, armed “with bludgeons and pitch-forks, the soldiers marched “very speedily to North-Leigh Heath again. They “found there a very large mob, armed desperately, “who insulted the officers and soldiers, and refused “to disperse, though the Justices read the Riot Act “and proclamation to them. After upwards of an “hour had elapsed, the souldiers, being still insulted,

" the Justices ordered the grenadiers to disperse the "mob, and to take the ringleaders, and disarm the "rioters; this they did, under the command of their "officers, whose diligence and alacrity cannot be "enough commended. Three or four parties of "grenadiers pursued the ringleaders over the hills, "and took, in all, nine of them. Thus we have, "without the effusion of blood, got clear of an affair "which threatened consequences as fatal as any riot "in the memory of man. This happy event is owing "to the presence of mind of the Justices, and the "coolness of the soldiers when in the ranks, and to "their astonishing diligence as soon as they were "permitted to pursue the rioters. Several of the "ringleaders were taken by the officers' own hands. "A vast number of bludgeons were taken by the "soldiers."

Occasional outbreaks of a trivial nature, have taken place in Witney and the neighbourhood since the above time, but they are almost forgotten now; and Witney, in common with other places, has in these later times reaped the benefits of peace.





CHAPTER IX.

The Manor.

THE Manor of Witney was granted by King Edward the Confessor to Alfwine—as was mentioned in the first chapter of this book. He does not appear to have held it for any considerable length of time, for, not long after, when the Queen was proved innocent of the accusations which had been flung at her with reference to her familiar intercourse with Alfwine, the Manor was granted in celebration of the event, together with nineteen others, to the Bishopric of Winchester. It is possible, however, that before this period the prelates of Winchester had resided in the fine old Hall, which stood on the site of the house which is now called “The Mount.”

The history of a place is, as a rule, much connected with those persons in positions of authority who from early times possessed the manorial rights.

So, the records of Witney, are, as we should expect, largely associated with the history of the Bishops of Winchester. Such is often found to be the case where the Lords of the Manor had no residence; some considerable alliance being usually found to exist between them and the people over whom they had this warrant of ascendancy. How much more would such a relation hold good in the present instance, when the prelates of Winchester appear to have frequently resided at Witney, and besides, held the patronage of the benefice. Hence some short notice of the men who were so closely interested in the place may perhaps not be considered inappropriate.

Aelfwine, or Alwyn, succeeded to the Bishopric of Winchester in 1032. He was a man of family and distinction, and it is said that when Queen Emma crossed over from Normandy, in order to marry Edmund the Unready, she was committed to the care of Alwyn by her father, the Duke of Normandy. Alwyn does not appear to have been an ecclesiastic when he set out from Normandy. His life had been passed, till this period, in assisting in the fearful wars which were then devastating all Europe. But afterwards, as was by no means uncommon in those days, he entered the ministry of the Church, and, chiefly through the influence of Queen Emma, he was appointed to the Bishopric of Winchester. This was effected by the license of the king, without permission from the Pope, an act which furnishes sufficient evidence that Rome had, at that time, made no claim to appoint English bishops. It is

possible that this Bishop either built or enlarged Witney Palace, but here we have no guide, as the only record of the style of the structure shows nothing earlier than the date of the later Norman Kings.

His successor, Stigand, does not appear to have had any special connection with Witney, and, perhaps, as he was by no means a perfect specimen of a Prelate, the place did not suffer from this fact, but Walcelin, or Walkelin, who succeeded Stigand, appears to have spent a portion of his time at Witney. He was a very great Church builder, and has the credit of building a good deal of Winchester Cathedral; hence it is quite possible that some of the old Norman Church at Witney was erected during his time. A story is told with respect to his love for architecture which illustrates the zeal, which distinguished him in erecting ecclesiastical buildings.

The King is said to have given him permission to take as much timber from his wood, called Hempage, as he could cut and carry in four days and nights. With such zeal did the Bishop inspire those who worked for him that it is said the whole wood was removed in the time named. The King happened to pass by the place where the wood had stood. "Am I fascinated?" said the monarch. "Where am I? Had I not a delightful wood here?" The Royal anger blazed out, but when Walkelin had made his excuses to the monarch, the latter is said to have remarked, "Walkelin, I was too liberal in my grant, and you too avaricious in the use you

made of it." It is difficult to doubt, with a knowledge of this Bishop's love for building, that, when he visited his palace at Witney, he would not rest until he had exercised his piety and taste in building, or improving the House of God so near his palace.

It was during the episcopate of Walkelin, that the Great Survey of Doomsday Book was made, or at least completed. The portion of it which refers to Witney is as follows :—

"The Bishop of Winton holds Witenie, Stigand (now Archbishop) did hold it."

"Here are XXX hides."

"The land is XXIII ploughs."

"There are now in the lordship V ploughs and IX bondsmen, XXXVI Townsmen, with XI borderers having XX ploughs."

"Here are II mills of XX XII shillings and VI pence, and IV acres of meadow."

"The woods III leagues (or miles) long, and II leagues broad, with their obligations (or outgoings) are worth L shillings."

"In King Edward's time the whole was valued at XXII pounds, now at XXV pounds."

What Doomsday book gives us is something which may be relied on as fairly accurate, as accurate, no doubt, as our modern decennial census returns—about the subject of which it treats. Most of the townships included in the Great Survey, survive as parishes, bearing in almost all instances the same name, and having the same, or almost the same boundaries.

The *bondsmen* mentioned in the preceding quotation in Doomsday Book, were those who held land at the will of the lord and townsmen—free tenants whose rent was fixed at an annual service. *Borderers*, were an obscure class of tenants, but agreeing in the main with cottars. If an average of 10 persons be allowed for each holding, there was a population of 560, but the millers and handicraftsmen would, probably, make the number reach 650, or thereabouts ; and when it is remembered that the total population of England was, at the period when the Great Survey was taken, but three millions, we shall not be wrong in stating that Witney was, in the 11th century, a fairly important place.

William Giffard, the next lord of Witney, was occupied chiefly with political matters. The Crusades, too, were exciting much attention, so that it is not at all surprising to find that during the episcopacy of this Bishop, time was not found to pay the Palace at Witney a visit.

Henry of Blois, Abbot of Glastonbury and King Stephen's brother, seems to have frequently visited the Palace at Witney, and spent a considerable portion of his time there, at least, as much as can be expected of a man who was ceaselessly engaged in attending to the affairs of his unfortunate brother.

It is possible that Henry of Blois may have built some part of Witney Church, though what part it would be impossible to conjecture. It was during his episcopate that the important Charter of Robert,

Bishop of Lincoln, containing the confirmation of a donation to Walter, the first Prior of Holy Cross, and his brethren, of a number of Churches, including "Witteneia," was made.

This Prelate was the real ruler of the realm for more than twenty years. On the coinage of the period the Bishop is represented on one side, the King on the other; and, as there was a mint at Witney, silver pennies, then the only coins, may have been minted at Witney.

Not much is heard, for some time, of Witney in connection with its lords, doubtless for a reason before given—the enthusiasm which the Crusades created. This relates to the two successors of Henry of Blois, but the next, Peter de Orival, de Rupibus, or des Roches, passed much of his time at Witney, and was frequently visited by more than one Sovereign. This man played an altogether important part at the unhappy period when the nation had the misfortune to be governed by Henry III, a Sovereign of foreign sympathies, and weak will. It was during the minority of this King that the Bishop acquired such remarkable influence over him. In the reign of John, Des Roches had been much concerned in the events which had taken place with reference to matters of great moment which were then proceeding. How John and his son Henry visited Witney has been related in another chapter. Des Roches was a Poitevin, one of a band of foreigners, who were much better versed in the

art of pleasing monarchs than were the English. The influence of Des Roches over Henry III was great during the minority of the latter, and he still retained this when the King arrived at years of discretion. There were at the Court, at that time, two parties—those who were in favour of English courtiers and statesmen; these gathered round the gallant Englishman, Hubert de Burgh—and, on the other hand, there were foreign mercenaries who had been raised to power in a previous reign, and these gathered round the wily Poitevin. The great characteristic of Des Roches appears to have been his hatred of everything English, and for some years a strife went on with the Bishop and his hungry countrymen on the one side, and those on the other side who thought, not unnaturally, that they were capable of ministering to the wants of their own country without requiring help from outsiders. But there were other circumstances, besides the support of influential foreigners who had settled in England, which made Des Roches a formidable antagonist. At this time there was a struggle proceeding between the Churches of England and Rome, the latter endeavouring to assert that the former was subservient to the Pope. Peter was the avowed champion of the Papacy, and it is not at all unlikely that we have cause to attribute to this man the unhappy position in which the Church of England found herself soon after this date. The strife between Hubert de Burgh and Peter des Roches proceeded, but before long the cause of Hubert triumphed, and Peter finding his

influence on the wane, donned the scallop hat and staff and started on a pilgrimage to the Holy Sepulchre. After some years, the subtle Poitevin returned, and quickly regained his old influence over the King. The struggle again commenced, but this time Peter was more successful, and after a time accomplished the defeat of the brave Englishman, de Burgh. Then for some time Peter had matters very much his own way, though, of course, envy procured him many enemies. One of these was the earliest of our philosophers — Roger Bacon — a Franciscian Friar at Oxford, the man who was in thought some hundreds of years before his time. It was about this period that Bacon was imprisoned upon a charge of dealing with Satan, though whether it was before or after the time at which the following event happened, there is no opportunity of deciding. Bacon was one of the Royal Chaplains, and he appears to have had, as an Englishman, a peculiarly violent hatred of Des Roches. The King is said to have asked Bacon "of what a prudent pilot of a ship was most in peril?" "Stones and Rocks!" was the reply; the answer, of course, having reference to the name of his wily adviser—Peter of the Rocks. But a time was near when the power of the English became too great, and the skill of Peter and his band of foreigners was useless in face of the determination of those who were dear lovers of their country; and after Assemblies at Oxford, before and after which Peter would be likely to find time to visit his Palace at Witney, the King was compelled

to counsel his favourite to attend exclusively to his spiritual affairs. Des Roches, after several years of absence, returned to England, died at Farnham, and was buried in Winchester Cathedral.

Another important lord of Witney was Adam de Oreton. Possibly it was in connection with one of his visits to Witney that he preached at Oxford a remarkable sermon, which created much sensation at the time it was delivered. Taking as his text the words, "My head, my head," (ii Kings iv, 19), he endeavoured to prove that as the head of the kingdom was in disorder, it was the duty of the members to provide for their welfare. It has been stated in another part of this book that this Bishop presented to the Rectorate a man of the same name as himself, and one who was, therefore, in all probability, a relative.

The Manor was held for some centuries by the Bishops of Winchester, and, possibly, they visited the place until the 14th century. When the country was disturbed with commotions, the Palace at Witney was deemed unsuitable for means of defence, and the Winchester Prelates very naturally elected to live, all the year, in their stronger habitation at Farnham.

During the time of the Commonwealth, the Manor, with the appurtenances, was let by the Bishop of Winchester for a lease of lives, and William Lenthall, the Speaker of the House of Commons became the first Lord under the new conditions.

SPEAKER LENTHALL.

William, second son of William Lenthall, of Lachford, in Oxfordshire, was born at Henley-on-Thames in 1591. He entered himself as a commoner on the books of St. Alban's Hall, Oxford, but he does not appear to have taken a degree. He then proceeded to study law ; became a Counsellor of considerable note, and was elected Lent Reader to Lincoln's Inn. From a very early period of his career he settled in the neighbourhood of Burford, probably at Asthall, though he did not buy the Priory till some years after. There is the following entry in the Register of Baptism in Burford Church :—

“ 1626.—William, the son of Mr. William Lenthall baptised, January 8th.”

This entry of course refers to the baptism of a son of the Speaker.

In an Act of Parliament, dated 1629, relating to an enquiry into certain affairs connected with the town of Burford, he is spoken of as Mr. William Lenthall, of Burford. He purchased the Priory of Lord Falkland, in 1636. This was not given him by the Parliament, as the author of the *Mystery of the Good Old Cause* asserts, but there is every reason to believe that the estate was bought under an assumed name—the supposition being that Lord Falkland knew that Lenthall had a desire for the estate, and he would ask from him a higher price than from an ordinary individual, while Speaker Lenthall, whose avaricious

desires were always plainly discernible, would desire to purchase at the lowest possible price.

Lenthall was first elected Member for Woodstock in 1639, at the very time that the struggle between the King and the Parliament began to assume a most serious appearance. A new Parliament had been elected, and the election had run in favour of the popular party. Lenthall, although a lawyer of some reputation, was quite a novice in Parliamentary matters, and his election as Speaker by the party opposed to the King, created some astonishment. He does not appear to have made a very favourable impression as Speaker (being regarded as rather mild and timorous) till the King took the ill-advised step of trying to arrest five Members of the House of Commons, who had been his most persistent opponents. On this occasion, Lenthall acted with great courage and wisdom. The King approached the House with his usual retinue, and as he walked up the floor the Members stood up to receive him. Speaker Lenthall quitted the Chair, which the King immediately occupied. He made a short speech in which he demanded the five Members, and asked the Speaker, who was standing below, if any of the five were in the House. Then it was that Lenthall, falling on one knee, made the following answer, which is often quoted now in debates respecting the jurisdiction of the Speaker :—

“ I have, Sir, neither eyes to see, nor tongue to speak, in this place, but as the House is pleased to direct me, whose servant I am ; and I humbly

ask pardon that I cannot give any other answer to what your Majesty is pleased to demand of me."

The King soon found out that the birds had flown, and left the Chamber, some of the indignant Members shouting, "Privilege, Privilege."

Things continued to prosper with the Speaker, and he seems to have been remarkably successful in his efforts to obtain money. He became Master of the Rolls in 1643 (worth £3,000 per annum); one of the Commissioners of the Great Seal, 1646 (worth £1,500 per annum); Chamberlain of the City of Chester (a place of profit and honour); and Chancellor of the Duchy of Lancaster (worth £1,000 per annum); and as a writer has quaintly remarked "anything else he desired." Besides the offices mentioned above, he had £2,000 per annum as Speaker.

In 1648, Lenthall gave his casting vote against the proposal, in the House, that negotiations should proceed with the King in the Isle of Wight. Lenthall continued Speaker of the Long Parliaments till 1653, when the career of that body was brought to an unexpected close. This Parliament did not, it was stated, represent the feeling of the nation, and the Members had been requested to resign by Cromwell and others. The resignation of their seats by the Members was the only legal way in which a dissolution could be brought about, as there was no Sovereign to order a compulsory dissolution. It was soon apparent that the Members had no intention whatever, of resigning. If, however, they thought

their position a secure one, they suffered a rude awakening, for on a momentous day in the History of England, the Protector with 300 musketeers went down to the House. A debate was proceeding, relating to the payment of officers in the Army, when Cromwell entered the Chamber, saying, "I have come to do a thing which I have prayed God day and night with tears that it might not be necessary for me to do." He listened to the debate for a time, then suddenly said, "Now is the time I must do it," stamped with his foot, and the musketeers poured in. Lenthall expressed his determination not to leave the Chair till forced. "Sir, I will lend you a hand," said Harrison, and Lenthall with the other Members was forced to go, with the words, "Make way for honester men," ringing in their ears. Cromwell at the same time appears to have had a very sincere respect for Lenthall, as in the following year he became Speaker of the Parliament then sitting. He was the Speaker, too, of the Parliament which sat during the Protectorate of Richard Cromwell, and in his capacity as Speaker, welcomed General Monk, when he came with his army to put an end to the uncertainty relating to the government of the country.

After the honourable part Lenthall had taken in the formation of the Commonwealth, it seems strange that he should subscribe £3,000 towards the expenses of the Restoration. It may have been, of course, that Lenthall honestly recognised that a monarchy was again essential to the nation, and

certainly General Monk asserted that the Restoration could not have been brought about without his help ; but at the time, the money was looked upon as the price paid for the purchase of his own safety. He was exiled, as were most of the leaders of the Republican movement, but the sentence was quickly recalled, and Lenthall appears to have settled down to live his remaining days in peace at the Priory.

Before his death he is said to have made a confession to the Rev. Dr. Ralph Brideoak, Rector of Witney, in something like the following terms :—

“Yes, there is my trouble, my disobedience, not against my natural parents only, but against the Pater Patriæ, our deceased Sovereign. I confess with Saul, I held their clothes whilst they murdered him, but herein I was not so criminal as Saul was : for God, thou knowest, I never consented to his death. I ever prayed and endeavoured what I could against it, but I did too much, Almighty God forgive me.”

On being urged to confess what he knew of the murder of the King, he distinctly denied that he was cognisant of the end they had in view :—

“Cromwell and his agents deceived a wiser man than myself, I mean that excellent King ; and they might well deceive me also, and so they did.”

After this confession he received the absolution of the Church, Wood says, “with much content and satisfaction.”

It is by no means certain that Lenthall confessed in anything like the terms Brideoak asserted he did. The latter was a contemptible time-server, who did not hesitate to adopt any steps if only he could secure his own advancement. No doubt Lenthall made some sort of confession, though, probably not so contemptible a one as Brideoak afterwards asserted.

In the preamble to his will he left explicit instructions that no monument should be raised to his memory :—

"As to my body and buryall, I do leave it to the disposition and discretion of my executor, hereafter named, but with this special charge, that it be done as privately as may be, without any state, acknowledging myself to be unworthy of the least outward regard in this world, and unworthy of any remembrance, that hath been so great a sinner, and I do further charge and desire that no monument be made for me, but at the utmost a plain stone with this inscription only—*Vermis sum.*"

He acknowledges to have been plentifully blessed with worldly goods—

"Given unto me by my dear God that made heaven and earth, and hath provided for me a place, not made with hands, but eternally in the heavens ; yet that it may be manifest to the world how injuriously to my prejudice false rumours, and lying lips, have advanced my temporal estate, I shall truly manifest the same to the world by the gifts and bequests hereafter to be made."

Speaker Lenthall died at the Priory in 1662, and was buried under Pynnock's Aisle in Burford Parish Church.

In 1670, Lord Cornbury was the Lord of the Manor of Witney, and after this Henry, Earl of Clarendon, who was succeeded by Lawrence, Earl of Rochester. In 1751, the Duke of Marlborough acquired the Manorial Rights, and in 1821 the Earl of Shaftesbury, but the Manor came again to the Marlboroughs, and was finally purchased by them not many years ago.





CHAPTER X.

Grammar School.

THE family of Box appears to have been early and honourably connected with the town of Witney. By referring to the extracts, taken from the Churchwardens' Account Book, the part some members took in Church matters may be seen, and the following extract from the Calendars of State Papers is not without interest:—

"1633-1634. Jan. 22. Calendar of State Papers.

"Sir Francis Wenman and Dr. John Standard
"to the Council. In obedience to their order of 6th
"December, 1633, on a petition preferred by Philip
"Box and John Box, sons and administrators of
"Thomas Box concerning the taking away of a
"statute of £360, acknowledged by John Bainsford to
"Thomas Box, with other writings; the writers
"met at Witney on the 17th inst., and called the

"parties before them. Finding no possibility of "composing the differences, they certify that there "was such a statute, which they believe to be "undischarged; and Elizabeth Box, widow of "deceased, and mother of petitioners, professes that "the statute and other writings were brought in a "trunk into the house of Rob. Bowman, father-in-law "of John Box, and were left there in John Box's "chamber, which chamber Rob. Bowman confesses "he brake open, that he might come at two beds "which he had occasion to use for strangers, but "denies that he brake up any trunks, and yet John "Box affirms that he lost divers writings out of those "trunks, in his absence."

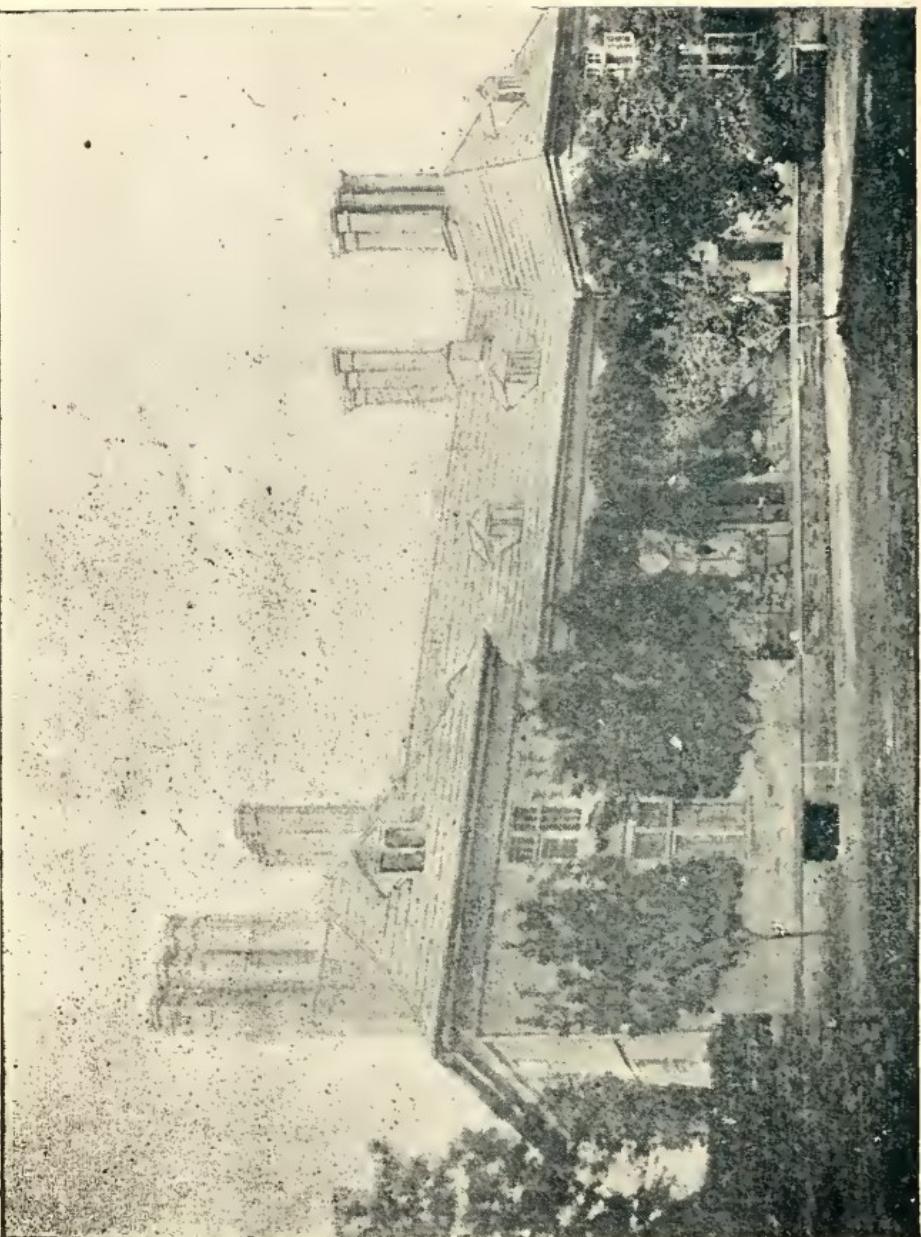
This is all that can be ascertained with reference to this family; it may be assumed, however, that they occupied a position of some importance in Witney, and that they identified themselves with most things which were for the benefit of the town in which they resided.

Henry Box, the founder, is described by the Rev. William Mills, M.A., in a poem, entitled, "In Memoriam," (written to commemorate the Bicentenary of the School), as of Oriel College, Oxford; proceeding thence to a London house of business, in which he appears to have acquired considerable wealth and to have become a man of some importance. He seems, also, to have served in Parliament in James I's reign. But he did not forget his native place and in his will, made in 1663, he left a certain sum of money to establish a School, the following

BY CHESTER VAUGHAN.

WITNEY GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

FROM A PHOTO



particulars, respecting which, have been obtained from the Rev. H. F. Pinder, M.A., the present Head-master of Witney Grammar School.

FREE SCHOOL AT WITNEY, OXFORDSHIRE.

FOUNDED BY HENRY BOX, ESQ.

Henry Box, Citizen and Grocer, of London, by his will made in 1663, after reciting that, out of a sincere intention of public good, he had, at his own proper costs and charges in his lifetime, erected a large Free School, with a very fair house for one schoolmaster, and one usher, standing upon two acres of ground, in Witney, in the County of Oxford, declared his intention to settle the said house and land, and £50 per annum, charged on his lands at Longworth, Berkshire. And further declared that his intention was to have the same settled upon the four Wardens of the Fraternity of the Art or Mystery of Grocers of the City of London, for the maintenance of the said Free School, schoolmaster, and usher.

By an Act of Parliament, 15, Charles II, entitled ‘An Act for the settling of a Free School in Witney, in the County of Oxon, being erected and endowed by Henry Box, Citizen and Grocer, of London, deceased,’ it was enacted that for ever thenceforth there should be in the town of Witney, in the County of Oxon, one Free Grammar School for education and instruction of children and youth, to

be called the Free Grammar School of the foundation of Henry Box, and that there should be one master and one usher of the said School, and that the four Wardens of the Company of Grocers, should be Governors of the revenues and possessions of the Grammar School, and they were for that purpose incorporated by the name of the Governors of the Free Grammar School of Witney, in the County of Oxon, of the foundation of Henry Box, and of the possessions and revenues thereof; and that Mary Box, relict of the said Henry Box, might ordain statutes, constitutions, and ordinances, touching the said schoolmaster, usher and scholars. And that the Provost of Oriel College, in Oxford, and four of the Senior Fellows there for the time being, or any three of them, whereof the said Provost to be one, should be, and were thereby appointed Visitors of the said school for ever, who were thereby required from time to time to act, do, execute, and perform all and every matter and thing, whatsoever, fitting, usual, and requisite in that behalf.

By an indenture, dated the 19th of July, 1670, after reciting that Mary Box had paid into the hands of the Wardens of the Grocers' Company the sum of £286, in consideration of that sum, paid to Ralph Box, by the said Wardens, Ralph Box granted to the Wardens a rent charge of £13 a year out of the said property, in the parish of Longworth. The application of the said sums of £50 and £13 is declared to be as follows:—

	£.
To the Master	35
out of which he was to pay for a Dinner to the Visitors £2, and to keep for repairs £3.	
To the Usher	15
To the Writing Master	10
To the Poor of Witney	2
To the Visitors for Horse Hire, when visiting the School ...	1

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Certain ordinances, dated the 14th December, 1674, were made by Mary Box, in accordance with the Act, of which the material points are that the Master should be a Master of Arts of a University within the dominion of the Crown of England, and that Latin, Greek, and Hebrew should be taught free in the School to thirty scholars of the town of Witney, with preference to the poorest inhabitants.

A Writing and Arithmetic Master is to be appointed with a salary of £10 a year; the foundation boys to pay 1/- and the others 5/- a quarter for such instruction. The Visitors are to ascertain, and certify the fitness of the persons nominated for the office of master, or usher.

By subsequent ordinances made in 1805 by the Governors, with the approbation of the Visitors, every scholar, except a descendant of Henry Box, was required to pay to the Master, besides the admission fee of 2/6, the sum of one guinea a

quarter, and to the usher, for instruction in writing and arithmetic, 5/- a quarter.

The Rev. Henry Gregory took office as Head Master, in 1834, when the pupils numbered nine. Upon his retirement in 1876, there was only one pupil. The Court of Assistants, after anxious consultation with the Charity Commissioners, decided that it would be undesirable to attempt to revive the Grammar School, but that there appeared to be a fair prospect of success for a Middle-class day and boarding school, adapted to the requirements of the farmers, and tradespeople of Witney and the neighbourhood. The School buildings were accordingly modernised, and thoroughly renovated at an expense to the Company of about £1,500, and with the concurrence of the Charity Commissioners, Mr. Heel of Stamford House, Witney (where he had a school of twenty boarders, and seventeen day boys) was nominated Head Master.

HEAD MASTERS.

By Act of Parliament, Mary Box appointed Masters till her death in 1718.

1718. Rev. John Goole. First Master appointed by the Wardens of the Grocers Company.

1748. Rev. Benjamin Gutteridge.

1767. Rev. George Seele.

1805. Rev. Thomas Cripps.

1834. Rev. Henry Gregory.

1876. Mr. J. J. Heel.

1881. Rev. H. F. Pinder.

At the commencement of the 18th century this School was the subject of much contention amongst the inhabitants, and, as was the custom of the time in any dispute, pamphlets were published concerning the matter. It is unnecessary to refer in detail to the quarrel, it will be sufficient to remark that the principal allegation against the head-master at the time was that he had not treated the children of Dissenters so well as he had those of the Church people. The names of the pamphlets published are here given :—

(1). “The Contract violated, or the Hasty Marriage, by John Goole, M.A., Master of the Free School at Witney, and Vicar of Eynsham, in the county of Oxford.” This pamphlet relates to a clandestine marriage between the author and Dr. Hudson’s daughter.

(2). “The present state of the Free School at Witney, in Oxfordshire, &c.”

(3). “An answer to a scandalous pamphlet, entitled, ‘The present state of the Free School at Witney, in Oxfordshire, &c., by John Goole, M.A., Vicar of Eynsham, and Master of the Free School at Witney, in the county of Oxford. (Oxf., 1721 8vo.)’ ”

(4). “Remarks upon Mr. Goole’s answer to the present state of the Free School at Witney, in Oxfordshire. By R. Collier. (London, 1721, 8vo.)”

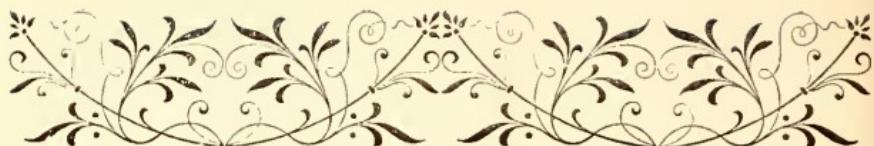
In 1761 the School was beautified and repaired by the Rev. Benjamin Gutteridge, Master. Under the same master, the School sent many pupils to

the University of Oxford. There is in the School House, and the property of the School, a small but excellent collection of books. The author is indebted to the Rev. W. D. Macray, M.A., Rector of Ducklington, for the following account of these books :—

"In Witney Grammar School, founded in 1663, "there is a small library, numbering probably about "200 volumes. They comprise many old folio and "quarto editions of classical writers, with various "lexicons, useful books, but of no particular value, "except that amongst them is a very fine copy of "the rare Eustathian Homer, printed at Rome in "1542-50, 4 vols., and a good copy of Stephen's own "edit. of his Thesaurus with a fine one of Stephen's "Budæus, printed in 1548. Amongst books non- "classical is a very good copy of Walton's Polyglott, "with the rare dedication to Charles II, but not the leaf "with Cromwell's name. A fine copy of the Bishops' "Bible, of 1583, Minsheu's "Guide of tongues, 1627," "Plot's Oxfordshire; Sanderson's Sermons; Bayle's "Dict., &c. In the latter half of the last century, "several alumni contributed to the enlargement of "the library, viz. Edw. Stone, Scholar of Wadham "College; Charles Tyrrell, of Exeter Coll.; John le "Marchant, of Pembr. Coll.; in 1752, Thos. Knight, "gent com., and Thos. Horne, scholar, of Trin. "Coll.; in 1757, Rob. Freind; in 1758, Rob. "Stephens, of Trin. Coll.; in 1759, George Watts; "in 1760 Rob. Southley, of Queen's Coll; but in "the present century there have only been two,

"John Leech, solicitor, who gave, in 1809, a folio
"prayer book, printed in 1706 ; and the Rev. Thomas
"Cripps, M.A., Head-master, who left, about 1830,
"some small books of still smaller value ; but amongst
"them he left also a little M.S. volume, which has
"a good deal of interest. It is a common place book
"of Ralph Warcopp, of Ch. Ch., afterwards M.P. for
"Oxfordshire, in the time of James I, while he was
"resident in the University. It contains many
"copies of Latin letters relative to the Universities,
"and interesting historical collections which display
"strong Protestant feeling. There are some Latin
"lines on a ring, sent by Queen Mary of Scotland
"to Queen Elizabeth, in 1562."

The visitor to Witney will scarcely fail to observe on the left, after passing the Church from the G.W.R. station, a magnificent avenue of elm trees. These lead to Box's Grammar School, and entirely shut out the interesting and substantial School House from public gaze. Here, during some centuries, the youths of the town have had opportunities for reaping the benefits which good old Box arranged for them in ancient times. It is possible, and indeed probable, that it was in a house which formerly stood on the site of the present one that the Box family lived, and it may have been from the fact that the family had no more use for a living place in Witney that Henry Box decided to give this house for the education of boys in his native town.



CHAPTER XI.

Charities of Witney.

BLAKE'S SCHOOL.

WILLIAM BLAKE endowed by will, dated 1693, a School in the High Street for thirty children. The sum was only £6 per annum with which this School was endowed, but the house and garden were also given as well as an unimportant sum for the repairs. This charity appears to have been lost ; at least, in a report of the Charity Commissioners, dated 1871, a blank space appears, where in charities still in existence there is an account of the income derived ; but in 1823 the School was in existence, and twenty-five scholars attended it.

CHURCH GREEN ALMSHOUSES.

This is an ancient charity, for when an inquisition was taken under a Commission for charitable uses, in 1652, this was then in existence. The property

situated near the entrance to the Grammar School, was renovated in 1814. The rents are now paid to the Witney Feoffees and applied to the use of the poor. Present income £39.

HOLLOWAY'S ALMSHOUSES AND SCHOOL.

John Holloway, of Finsbury, by will dated 1723 directed his executors to build an Almshouse on Church Green for the residence of six poor widows. He also left his estate at Curbridge to the same charity.

The testator also left his house, situated at the bottom of Woodgreen Hill, to be used as a school. He endowed the latter with his estates in the parish of Stonesfield, also two fields containing 18 acres in Hailey, and his estate, called Black Pit Assarts. The testator directed that the boys educated at this school should be clothed after the manner of the Bluecoat Hospital boys in London, and he especially stipulated that the scholars should be the sons of poor journeymen weavers. The Charity Commissioners reported in 1823, that this charity might be usefully extended by admitting the children of journeymen fullers, and this seems to have been done of late years.

In 1823, the property belonging to the Almshouse charity, consisted of 79 acres, 1rd. 34pls at Curbridge, also of 15 acres 6 poles in the same village ; at Ducklington, 5 acres of grass land ; at Crawley, land let at 30/- per annum ; at Curbridge, Sturnham Meadow, one acre. The School property

in 1823 consisted of 47 acres, 2 roods, 12 poles of land at Stonesfield ; about 20 acres at Hailey ; the Black Pitt Assarts, containing 22 acres, 2 roods, 10 poles.

John Holloway also directed that 20/- per annum should be allowed to the trustees for taking care of the estates. After the payment of the expenses connected with the school, the rents and profits of the estates were directed to be applied to the placing out of the boys in some honest trade or calling.

Edmund Wright also gave in 1860 £4,800 Stock, the interest of which was to be applied to the Bluecoat School.

HEYLING'S CHARITY.

Henry Heyling of Minster Lovell, left in 1695 for the relief of the poor of Witney, the sum of £100. From the report of the Charity Commissioners in 1823, it would appear that this money was used for the purchase of an estate at Hailey, now in the possession of the Trustees of the Freelands. The testator expressly stipulated that this money should be applied to the relief of those who were not in receipt of parish pay ; and they were, moreover, to be of the number of those who should frequent the Church of Witney.

FREELAND ESTATE.

Several people appear, at various times, to have left to the poor of Witney different sums, and these amounted in 1682 to £417 10s. In the 33rd year

of Charles II's reign, this was ordered to be laid out in land, and an estate called the Threfts, was purchased. In 1813, Great Vincents and Little Vincents were bought at Freeland, and Horse Lease at Bampton, from monies accruing from the sale of timber on the Threfts ; land at Hailey appears also to have been purchased, and in 1823 the average income was declared to be as follows :—

Rent of Freeland Farm	43	0	0
Average of underwood in 10 years	17	6	0
Ditto of Timber in 10 years	46	0	0
Rent of Bampton Land	18	0	0
Rent of Hailey Land	12	0	0
	<hr/>		
	£ 136 6 0		

In 1867 the income was £92 10s., half of which sum was spent in kind, and the other half in distribution of money.

CHARITIES UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE BAILIFFS.

William Lee left in 1632 the sum of £100 to the intent that land might be purchased, which should yield £2 13s. 4d. yearly. Forty shillings of this was directed to be laid out in bread and beef every Christmas Eve to 40 poor men and women ; 10/- yearly for a sermon, to be preached on Christmas Day in the afternoon ; "3/4 to be laid out in a drinking for the said feoffees, in consideration for their pains therein."

Joan Green left £20, with which a house in Corn Street was purchased, the rent of which was

to be applied for the relief of poor widows in Witney, on Christmas Eve.

Thomas Yeate left an annuity of 40/- to the use of the poor of Witney.

John Smith, of Hailey, gave certain lands in Hailey, one half of the produce of which should be for the use of the poorest widows and orphans of Hailey, and the other half for like objects in Witney.

Thomas Wiltshire left 10/- yearly out of a certain tenement, for the use of the town.

Richard Ashcombe left a house, adjoining the Town Hall, now occupied by Messrs. Clappen. The rent of the dwelling-house and shops, in 1823, about £15 a year, was received by the Bailiffs, and applied by them towards discharging the expense of a dinner, about Michaelmas, on their being elected.

"From the year 1760 this rent has never been entered amongst their general receipts, but has always been applied as at present; and a decree of Commission of charitable uses, in 1676, by which the income of the several premises in Witney were ordered to be disposed of to the poor, expressly excepts the Town House, probably meaning this house."—(*Report of Charity Commissioners, 1823*).

The property in the possession of the Bailiffs in 1823 was as follows:—The Town House; the Town Hall; three houses on the South side of Corn Street; house on the North side of Corn Street; four tenements; three tenements in Gunn's Hole; a charge of 10s. on a house in Corn Street; a rent charge of 40s. on the Free School.

The whole of the above produced a rental at the date mentioned of £47 6s. 8d.

CHARITIES UNDER THE MANAGEMENT OF THE CHURCHWARDENS.

WEST AND WALTER'S CHARITY.

Elizabeth West, by will dated 1638, left property in the parish of Appleton, one half to the parishioners of Witney ; the other to Eynsham and Standlake. This charity was to be disposed of in bread, the Churchwardens to have 12d. for a dinner. They were also to cause a sermon to be preached on Easter Day.

John Walter, by will dated 1635, left property in Appleton, one half of the profits of which should be for the use of the poor and impotent of Witney ; the other half for Standlake and Eynsham. This charity was directed to be distributed in bread. The Churchwardens were allowed to take yearly from his charity the sum of 10s., provided they did their duty. The income, in 1823, was £70 ; £35 came to Witney.

ANDREW HOLLOWAY'S CHARITY.

Andrew Holloway left six houses in Corn Street, called Duck Alley, the profits of which were to be given for the poor of Witney in bread. If the houses named were not kept in good repair the gift was to go to the town of Bampton.

COLLIER'S CHARITY.

Francis Collier left land at Hailey, amounting to five acres, the profits of which were to be given in bread to the poor of Witney (such as usually attend Church). A table of benefactions, which used to stand in the Church, stated that Francis Collier left two gifts, one estate of £6 10s. per annum; the other one of £8 10s. per annum, both lying in Hailey. The latter of these appears to have been lost many years ago.

George Poulton, by will dated 1774, gave a parcel of meadow ground, called "Goose Ham," containing one acre, the profits arising from the rent of which were to be distributed in the same manner as the charity known as West and Walter's Charity.

WILMOT'S CHARITY.

Leonard Wilmot, in 1608, left £4 yearly to be distributed amongst the poor of Witney. The testator especially stipulated that no part of this charity should be enjoyed by those who were in receipt of parish relief. The sum mentioned, £4, was, in 1823, given away on Good Friday in sixpences to poor people of the parish.

CHARITIES FOR LOANS.

By an inquisition, taken under a Commission dated 1652, it was found that sums, amounting to £97 6s. 8d., had been given for loans to poor tradesmen. This money, with interest, &c., amounted at a later time to £536 10s. 4d. A large part of

this sum was expended in the purchase of lands at Eynsham, called Freeland ; but, in 1823, Commissioners reported that they could find no trace of the existence of any part of the money left for loans.

ORGANIST.

James Leverett, of Witney, by will dated 1783, left the sum of £600 for the purchase of a good organ, to be put in the parish Church of Witney, the residue to be placed out at interest, and to be applied to the support and salary of an organist at Witney. The residue was £404, and this, in 1823, brought in an income of £12 2s. od.

WARING'S CHARITY.

Elijah Waring, by will dated 1813, directed £1000 to be given to Witney, the interest of which was to be applied for the purchase of bread, to be distributed amongst the poor inhabitants of Witney, Hailey, Crawley, and Newland. This money was invested in the three per cents.

GRAMMAR SCHOOL.

Henry Box, by will, dated 1661, gave the School House at Witney, and he also gave to the said school an annuity of £50.

COAL FUND.

G. J. Hanks gave in 1874 £1,000 to the Rector and Churchwardens, the interest of which was to be expended in coal.

Mrs. Warrington, by will, 1881, left £450 to the Bailiffs of Witney, the interest of which was to be given in coal to the poor.

The two last mentioned Charities are distributed by a Committee elected annually.

PRESENT DISTRIBUTION OF CHARITIES.

The following are the accounts of the Charities distributed in the town in 1892, so far as can be ascertained :—

WITNEY FEOFFEES.

RECEIPTS :—Rent of new houses, Church Green, £61 os. od.; rent of houses, High St., £30 os. od.; rent of land, Church Green, £8 10s. od.; rent of houses near Grammar School, £39 os. od.; a house South side Corn St., £12 os. od.; two houses North side Corn St., £11 11s. od.; Duck Alley (part year) £4 5s. 6d.; total £166 6s. 6d.

EXPENDITURE :—Paid Bailiffs £60 os. od.; Churchwardens £8 os. od.; Feoffees supper, £2 os. od. repairs, taxes, collector, and towards building new houses in Duck Alley, £96 6s. 6d.; total £166 6s. 6d.

The Feoffees are :—Messrs. J. D. Bliss, J. A. Clinch, H. Druce, Jas. Long, Jas. Marriott, H. H. Salmon, S. Shuffrey, and J. Swingburn.

FREELAND FEOFFEES.

RECEIPTS :—From Nanny Townsend's Gift £5 12s. 6d.; from rent Bampton property £12 10s. od.; from Freeland property, £58 16s. od.; from Cox's Close, £14 os. od.; total £90 18s. 6d.

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